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ABSTRACT

An introduction to the ideas, styles, and methods of a number of contemporary German artists in a variety of media is presented. The essays, each containing reproductions of art works representative of the subject matter, and each written by specialists in the subjects, includes the following: "Painting--Positions and Contradictions" (Wolfgang Max Faust); "Constructivism and Realism--on the Fringe" (Dietrich Mahlow); "Art as Intervention in the Human Sphere--Works Transcending Traditional Forms" (Stephan von Wiese); "Sculpture and Installations" (Andreas Franzke); "Photography as an Artistic Medium" (Klaus Honnef); "Actions-Happenings-Performance Art-Videos" (Wulf Herzogenrath); "Setting Off into New Regions--Environmental Art and Gestalt Technology" (Jurgen Claus); and "Design" (Klaus-Jurgen Sembach). A 23-item selected bibliography of resources in German also is included. (DB)

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Art Today in the Federal Republic of Germany

Inter Nationes

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Introduction

Today's art in the Federal Republic of Germany attracts great interest across the world. For the first time, artists from the Federal Republic are part of an internationally esteemed avant-garde. Since the end of the Seventies outstanding international exhibitions have drawn attention to German art and German artists. The trail-blazer in that development was Joseph Beuys, the key figure in Federal German art, to whom the Guggenheim Museum devoted a comprehensive show in 1979. In the years that followed, German neo-expressionist painting became the main focus of international interest. A 1981 exhibition at London's Royal Academy of Arts was called "A New Spirit in Painting". In the same year Paris presented "Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui", and Bologna offered "La giovane pittura in Germania" a few months later. In 1982 there followed the much-cited "Zeitgeist" exhibition in Berlin's Martin-Gropius-Bau, and in 1983 and 1984 a travelling show entitled "Expressions" toured new art from Germany in the United States. 1984 also saw "Origin and Vision" at Madrid and Barcelona, "seen from here" ("von hier aus") at Düsseldorf, and "The Rediscovered Metropolis", devoted to new painting from Berlin, at Brussels. In 1985 London presented "German Art in the 20th Century", the first such foreign stock-taking of German art, and West Berlin followed, putting the emphasis somewhat differently, with "German Art since 1945". Anselm Kiefer then received an enthusiastic reception from both public and critics during a 1987/88 exhibition of his work in the United States.

German art after 1945, long viewed as provincial, then overcame this tenacious prejudice within a single decade. Artists like Beuys, Kiefer, and Lüpertz confronted the national past, facing up in their works to the calamitous aspects of recent history and thereby so-to-speak implementing public mourning. Donald Kuspitt, the American art historian, commented on this development in the catalogue to the "Expressions" exhibition: "The new German painters are performing an exceptional service for the German people. These artists are burying for all time the ghosts of the German style, of German culture and history, so that people can really renew themselves ...

They can be freed of a past identity through this being artistically digested".

It was not merely this political dimension that gained international respect for contemporary art from the Federal Republic of Germany. An essential contribution was also made by the German art market which now operates internationally. An internationally regcognised forum for new art was created with the documenta at Kassel, held every four or five years since 1955, which endeavours to survey current artistic trends albeit with a degree of emphasis on what is happening in Germany. Museums have also long accepted the idea of buying and exhibiting the most recent art. In addition committed art associations (Kunstvereine) further the cause of new art in almost every larger city in the Federal Republic. Private patronage, which has long been important in other countries, has also gained in significance here. By now there are many firms that offer art prizes where the stress is on recent work.

In the Seventies Joseph Beuys clearly became the central figure in German art. His expanded concept of art constituted the most radical of challenges to traditional ideas. His works were intended to provoke – in terms of both form and subject-matter. They initiated transformation of perception among both artists and the recipients of art. As an artist Beuys embodied the fact that internationalism and regional commitment are not necessarily contradictory. His reflections of the cultural customs and traditions of his home region served as a model for pupils and other artists. The concept of "homeland" thus gained fresh creative power. This trend towards emphasising one's origins or chosen homeland, so significant in German art of the Twenties but consciously rejected in the Fifties and Sixties, gave rise to an artistic landscape of great diversity and regional specificity, reflecting in exemplary fashion both the historical background and the political structure of the Federal Republic of Germany. Artists living in Berlin establish different stylistic emphases to their counterparts in Düsseldorf, Cologne, Hamburg, Stuttgart, or Munich. The variety of local "Scenes" – recorded in a 1984 exhibition entitled "The Art Landscape of the Federal Republic" in which all of the country's art associations were involved – provides encouragement for what is by now an unsurveyable number of artists pursuing a huge range of styles.

German art today evades almost all categorisations. Our age's artistic situation is characterised by a pluralism of forms, styles, and methods. Hardly any artists consistently and exclusively commit themselves to a single style or technical medium. There are no limits to artistic creativity today. Spontaneity is valued more than concept, flexibility than consistency, association than theory, subjectivity than objectivity, play than pre-determined rules, and originality than professional craftsmanship. The boundaries between the free and the applied arts are also beginning to dissolve. The 1987 documenta 8 thus for the first time presented architecture and design alongside painting, sculpture, video installations, and performance. Nowadays painters are also sculptors, sculptors also designers, designers also architects, and architects also painters. Their motto is "Everything is Possible".

The whole of living reality – with all the media at our disposal for entertainment or information, all the technology supposed to make our existence easier, all the materials surrounding us, and all the political, social, and private considerations that preoccupy us – has become the object of art. Art today is painting, sculpture, photography, video, design. There are Performances, Happenings, Environments, Installations, Projections, Assemblages, Collages, and Arrangements. Art takes place on the earth, in the air, and under water, produced by computers and laser beams as well as with paint brushes, chisels, and other traditional equipment.

Concise presentation of "Art Today" in the Federal Republic of Germany is a difficult enterprise in view of the large number of artists and the range of forms and intentions involved. This booklet nevertheless attempts to provide an introduction to the ideas, styles, and methods of a number of artists. Many had to remain unnamed, and a number of concepts suffered from lack of space. The authors of individual contributions, all specialists in their subjects, have nonetheless attempted to depict the background to development of the art forms which today determine public discussion and artistic activities.

Wolfgang Max Faust

Painting –
Positions and Contradictions

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Since the end of the Seventies discussions about art in Western Europe and the USA have once again been primarily concerned with the traditional medium of "Painting". Regional approaches have also attracted attention. American artistic supremacy came to an end. Europe turned to its own traditions, establishing something akin to a newly-found identity in art.

That first happened in Italy. Since 1978 or so Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, and Mimmo Paladino have referred in their works to the traditions of Italian art without succumbing to an insipid historicism. Quite the contrary in fact. Italian artists combined artistic experience and their sense of life today, inventing in their pictures (Arte cifra) complex ciphers providing an encoded interpretation of our contemporary existence. Painting once again became a world-wide focus of interest and discussion thanks to these young Italians.

Around 1980 a younger generation of painters, which enlivened the art scene with a deluge of pictures, made its presence felt, spectacularly and loudly in the Federal Republic of Germany. The great response they attracted resulted both from the artists' fresh and youthful carefreeness, and from a "hunger for pictures" that had developed in the Sixties and, to an even greater extent, Seventies. In the mid-Sixties, a new art had developed as an international counter-reaction to the globally dominant aesthetic of Pop Art, expanding art's context from various perspectives. Intellectual forms (Minimal and Conceptual Art), Action Art (Happenings, Fluxus, and the work of Joseph Beuys), and material forms (Arte povera) shaped the scene. "Pictures" – in terms of painting – seldom surfaced. The "human image" largely vanished, giving way to forms which – searching for the essence of creativity – broke down art into social relationships or presented "Art about Art".

It was into that very vacuum brought about by the vanishing of pictures that young German painters – in Berlin, Cologne, and Hamburg – moved around 1980. At the same time it became apparent that a specifically German development with a renewed emphasis on painting had taken place in the Seventies alongside what was happening on the international art scene. Painters from the "older generation" (including Baselitz, Lüpertz, Hödicke, Polke, Richter, and Kiefer) may have been present in that decade's exhibitions but they only attracted attention commensurate with the importance of their work as a result of the international situation at the start of the Eighties.

Painting in West Germany was thus simultaneously represented by the works of two generations. The impossibility of speaking of a unified new style became clear. Attempts at summing up German painting of the early Eighties by applying such labels as "Neo-Expressionists" or "Neo-Fauves" are condemned to failure right from the start because they at most describe a limited aspect of the situation. Expressive gestures quickly declined in attractiveness after 1985. Pluralism rather than homogeneity is the most striking characteristic of this painting. Amid the co-existence of a variety of ideas about images, styles, and themes, painting presents itself as a focus where the most diverse conceptions of art can be experienced. What was previously discussed in various media now involves issues within the single medium of "Painting", giving rise to common ground and contradictions, to linking concepts and oppositions.

Painting as Painting

Ever since the mid 19th century art's claim to autonomy within bourgeois society has been debated. Art is supposed to assert itself from within its very self, to be a "social antithesis to society" (Adorno), countering the socialization of all spheres of existence. For painting that entails having to justify itself in terms of nothing but the means at its disposal, and being capable of possessing its reason for existence within itself. This concept of "Painting for painting's sake" also determines the work of many of today's painters, but their pictures indicate that it is a question rather than a self-assured answer.

Georg Baselitz, born in Saxony in 1938, has been transposing above and below in his paintings since 1969. That seems arbitrary behaviour, almost functioning as a gag, but Baselitz wants his way of seeing and depiction to be comprehended as a contribution to discussion of "Painting as Painting". According to Baselitz, an object painted upside down is "suitable for painting" because "it is thus unsuitable or value-free as an object. This method also sparks off confusion and shock. It presents an aggressive attitude which I find good as a demonstration of the seriousness of my action." The moment of shock, which initially stood behind Baselitz's concept, has lar-

gely vanished over the years. The fact that a subject can be painted upside down is just as much accepted today as "non-representational" painting in which the emphasis is also frequently on "Painting for painting's sake". Baselitz's concept is therefore faced with other problems at present. His method is so succinct and restricted that it almost has the impact of a "trademark", of a "label", which identifies the picture without any serious coming to terms with it being necessary. What is confusing now is the fact that Baselitz time and again manages to present the narrowness of this method as a form of freedom. That, however, only seems to succeed by way of self-contradiction. His subjects – say "Supper in Dresden" (1983) – are charged with significance. The energy of a "topsy-turvy" world and the visual topos of "falling man" bring about a disturbance depicting an element of productive disquiet rather than something that is "value-free". The ecstatically eruptive painting unites with the subject-matter, preventing a concept becoming a cliché. Baselitz's work in the realm of sculpture can also be seen as a further form of liberation from voluntarily assumed chains. Here he takes up what was discovered in German Expressionism's sculpture in wood. Raw and almost violent treatment of the wood can heighten simple bodily gestures to the point of their becoming primal visual signs, expressing elemental power and disquieting pathos.

Markus Lüpertz (born 1941) has also discovered sculpture as an additional form of expression alongside his painting. Lüpertz got under way at the start of the Sixties with the visual realisation of an individual programme which he summed up as "Dithyrambic Painting". That involved pursuit of an art intended to accord with his "intoxicated and enthusiastic" sense of being alive. The themes of his painting were initially somewhat peripheral but they took on central significance in the Seventies with his "motif painting" devoted to "German ideology". Themes such as "Black-Red-Gold" emerged, and also pictures entitled "Fascism". The tension between form and thematic content attains an endangered balance in Lüpertz's work. Taking the primacy of the painterly as their starting-point, these intellectually ambitious themes achieve a multiple ambivalence. Can the theme of "Fascism" be "painted" at all? Is not such a concept condemned to failure right from the start? Lüpertz's pictures take up this question in their confrontation with bombast, vanity, and "representation of the abstract". A provocation, deriving from the thematic references selected by Lüpertz, penetrates the concept of "Painting as Painting". The painter attempts by way of "simple themes" ("Standing Leg/Free Leg", "Morning", and "Evening") to make people forget this provocation, but then he returns it to the centre of attention through such ironically bombastic subjects as "The Expulsion from Paradise or the Archangel Puts His Foot Down."

Baselitz and Lüpertz entail two different aspects of painting which takes figuration as its starting-point yet primarily comprehends the picture as painterly self-identification. A more analytical approach is to be found in the work of *Gerhard Richter* (born 1932). Richter has been investigating the possibilities open to painting ever since 1962, and at the same time his "painted answers" constantly involve a radicalisation of this question. Painting thus emerges from behind the "possibilities of painting" as a possibility, as a form of human self-confirmation through sense experience. For Richter painting is always linked with a decision in favour of a specific type of picture. He paints pictures based on photographs. He paints canvases in single colours. He paints "grey pictures". He paints "abstract pictures". This production in series arouses the impression that these various types of picture solve a "problem". That aspect was, however, refuted in the parallel production of various possibilities – as in the "photo paintings" and the abstracts, dating from the same year, shown in the "von hier aus" exhibition (Düsseldorf 1984). The diverse possibilities are presented as being of equal value. None can lay any unique claim to being the only possibility or to asserting something akin to truth. Scepticism, analysis, and also an impersonal element underlie Richter's concept. The "abstract pictures" can in no way be read as gestural testimony to a momentary emotional expression as attempted in, say, "Abstract Expressionism". These are rationally calculated picture-signs which free the gesture from the appearance of naturalness and present it as a decision. That perceptible aspect of calculation constitutes the counterpart to the danger of arbitrariness and the negation of art, which would signify negation of pictures. Richter came closest to that negation in 1981 when in one of his exhibitions he presented completely normal large mirrors as "pictures".

Beyond Painting

"Painting as Painting" constitutes the most important element (despite differences of emphasis) in the artistic endeavours of Baselitz, Lüpertz, and Gerhard Richter. The fact that so much stress is put on that shows that painting today can hardly still be pursued on the basis of a definitive concept. In an age when there are no longer any religious and feudal commissions, every artist must himself (or herself) discover the reasons for his (or her) work, and convincingly arouse people's interest. At present strikingly few artists and art-lovers show interest in the concept of realism (the picture as an interpretive copy of seen reality) or in an unbroken tradition of abstract painting. The possibilities involved in those two approaches seem to be largely exhausted. What could be shown by way of such approaches has been made clear in the course of time.

Today's interest is principally directed towards figurative painting, which aims at discovering ciphers for reality as seen from a variety of perspectives and closely linked with artists' personal experiences.

A. R. Penck (born 1939), who originally worked (almost underground) in the GDR and now lives in the West, presents in his pictures the outline of an elemental visual language intended to be universally readable. Penck once again takes up the objectification of experiences in general signs, readable through abstractions from body language, which has been possible ever since cave painting or Egyptian hieroglyphs as a means of human understanding through the medium of art. Gestures are a universal language which is capable of linking human beings beyond the spoken word. Despite specific manifestations in each culture, it surmounts national and cultural frontiers. At the same time it reaches back into history. Signs of subjugation can, for instance, be discovered as archetypes everywhere in history. Penck does not, however, use such general aspects to create a depiction of states of affairs to be found at all times. He instead attempts to combine the general with today's political experiences. In the West Berlin "Zeitgeist" exhibition, which presented the international "Return to Painting" for the first time in 1982/83, Penck showed two pictures representing the "East" and the "West". In Düsseldorf's "von hier aus" exhibition, he raised the question of "Quo vadis Germania?" in a gigantic picture. In his works Penck stresses those elements of oppression and alienation which primarily determine life today in both East and West. He attempts to use aesthetic means on behalf of a kind of enlightenment, which lays claim to general significance, transcending the artist's subjectivity, through its reference to "elemental signs". An anonymous constituent, which is to be seen as a source of hope, as a sign language linking people, rather than as a diminution of individuality, thus enters his pictures. Against the background of social constraints and a blurring of political language brought about by experts in public relations, Penck is seeking a kind of "ideal language" which all human beings comprehend immediately. Pictures aim at a "hereafter". Penck hopes that they can change human conditions rather than just describe them.

Jörg Immendorff (born 1945) has known A. R. Penck for years but goes a different way. What is important for him is not the search for a visual "ideal language" but rather narrative painting describing political realities and states of political consciousness in picture-stories. He started out from an extreme leftist position viewing art (or rather bourgeois art) as being mainly an aspect of the superstructure of dominance and calling on artists to "Stop painting", and then became a critical portrayer of "German conditions". In a series of paintings entitled "Café Deutschland", initially sparked off by Italian-born Guttuso's "Caffè Greco", Immendorff assembled metaphors for a picture of Germany primarily determined by the experience of division. As in a historical illustrated broadsheet, he adds "states of affairs" which almost all refer to the "splendid misery" which both capitalism and "existing socialism" have in store for human beings. One feels in Immendorff's works that the life they show is subject to the law of alienation, that people cheat themselves (Disco, intoxication, violence), and that hope at best appears among outsiders. In his panoramas of general states of affairs, Immendorff therefore frequently includes very personal scenes, showing, for instance, his friendship with A.R. Penck, or referring to his "image" established somewhere between macho rocker and intellectual.

Immendorff's complex "Historical Pictures" (Scenes from a kind of contemporary picture bible) are set off against works limited to more restricted imagery. "Germany" in the shape of an ice floe or a frozen (red) "Star" floating in the water are the symbols deployed here on behalf of "enlightenment". Recently Immendorff has also turned to sculpture. His main work to date is a paraphrase of the "Brandenburg Gate".

Politics and contemporary history are the dominant sources of pictures for Penck and Immendorff, linked with a critical interpretation intended to make clear the artists' political allegiance.

Karl Horst Hödicke and Bernd Koberling from Berlin approach painting from a deliberately apolitical standpoint though.

Karl Horst Hödicke (born 1938) gradually turned to painting in the course of the Seventies. He originally worked in a wide range of media using images, objects, and texts, and also created grotesque films demonstrating an affinity with spontaneous Fluxus art. In his pictures Hödicke mainly concentrates on genre painting: themes from city life, scenes from the private sphere, pictures based on pictures (Böcklin, Picasso), or illustrations for mythological subjects. The diversity of subject is unified by way of a highly colourful style of painting, often utilising pure colours and creating an experience of immediacy through clearly visible broad brushwork. That communicates spontaneity with reference less to the objects painted than to their perception. Hödicke's pictures have the impact of fleeting moments, determined by the element of speed, which is perhaps the most important modern big city experience. As a result even his pictures of architecture convey an almost incorporeal ambiance of reality as a momentary impression. His mythological themes, however, seem like memories of a lost age, once again presenting what has long been cited.

Bernd Koberling (born 1938) mainly finds his themes in nature. Landscapes, the animal world, and the simple life ("Beach Workers") provide the occasion for his pictures. His painting does not merely depict such subjects though but brings itself into play as a shaping of this world. Colours, lines, and surfaces cre-

ate a multiple impact. On the one hand they define the seen reality, and on the other they – charged with the history of painting – demonstrate their own value. The interplay between a view of reality and the act of painting thus becomes Koberling's central theme. His pictures establish transitions between nature and art, and are determined by a visionary unity which links both spheres. A cosmic feeling, to be experienced in and through painting, can be sensed here. If, however, account is taken of the alienating experiences characterising social life today, these pictures simultaneously create a state of uncertainty. Do they not describe a form of escapism which develops a picture of the world denying contradictions and inconsistencies? This question becomes apparent in Koberling's works. Alongside belief in a kind of "universal oneness" we find breaches and traces of violence. An enforced conjunction of nature and painting is indicated, apparently pointing in two directions. Nature eludes the demands made by painting. Painting ensnares nature because it, shaped by intellect, wants to create a "second nature".

Anselm Kiefer (born 1945) is concerned with both nature and politics in his works, which are, however, neither "Historical Pictures" nor "Ideal Languages". What is involved here is a renewal of "Painting of Ideas". History, myth, religion, literature, and everyday events come together to form complex visual inventions behind which a moment of personal consternation is to be felt as the immediate cause. Religious themes ("Quaternity"), themes from German history ("The Hermannsschlacht"), and themes derived from philosophy and literature ("Ways of World Wisdom") are furnished with subjective interpretations, which is why Kiefer's works have the impact of visual testimony to states of experience and consciousness rather than as illustrations of history. Kiefer thereby consigns the element of interpretation to the medium of painting itself. He even deliberately damaged some of his pictures, using his hands or tools. Others were exposed to the weather. The significance of yet others was intensified by the utilisation of such materials as straw, wood, and lead. With Kiefer "art" is always "at risk". The idea of the beautiful can be politically misused, as for instance in the totalitarian aesthetics of fascism. At the same time though it constitutes an element of paradoxical hope. Pictures are simultaneously answers and questions to the extent that they transpose reality into open-ended symbols rather than delineating "reality". That is the basis of their productive power, showing in Kiefer's work that not everything is lost with regard to the present day.

Sigmar Polke (born 1931) has in recent years exhibited pictures which constantly change and ultimately destroy themselves because of his utilisation of photo-chemicals. The "Return of Painting" is linked with scepticism and doubts about the image. Other works by Polke can never be seen "properly" because of their incorporation of extremely shiny varnish. Reflections confuse the eye. Reproductions of such pictures completely falsify the impression. Painting resists "reproduction in the technical age", asserting a radical "here and now" at the level of its materiality.

In the early Sixties, Polke and Gerhard Richter together proclaimed the "Capitalist Realism" movement, which can be characterised by a strategy of affirmation with analogies to international Pop Art. Polke later devoted himself to a wide range of subject-matter. His pictures revealed links with esotericism or affinities with drug visions. They also referred to the aesthetic clichés of fabric patterns and illustrations from the mass media. Works that employ only one of these possibilities stand alongside others which bring together various genres. Complicated structures come into being; visual quotations from a great diversity of sources are combined; and pictorial ideas superimposed. Polke fluctuates between extreme wastefulness and asceticism, between conjuration and negation. Belief in the image is coupled with extreme scepticism, which also extends to the person of the painter. He is never clearly identifiable through his works. In every series of pictures he presents a different face, is a different person.

The painters presented up to now stand out among the "older generation" which still shapes the face of painting in West Germany today. To that must be added the work of the younger generation, which has attracted attention since the start of the Eighties. Theirs was a spectacular entrance onto the scene because it was staged by the artists concerned as a change-over of generations. Relationships with the "older generation" were somewhat suppressed in the process. Today the two standpoints are coming closer together again. Both connections and divergences are becoming clearer. A radical eye for one's own subjectivity can be said to be the point of departure for this "Young Painting". Self-expression, self-discovery, and self-endangering constituted the impulse for this painting, leading – once again – to extremely diverse concepts.

The Hamburg School

In Hamburg at the start of the Eighties it was mainly Werner Büttner and Albert Oehlen who developed a style characterised by scepticism and irony.

Werner Büttner (born 1954) prepared the way for his paintings in a series of drawings which he called the "disaster of democracy". With his cynically encoded paraphrases of words and images he draws attention to the contradictions he supposedly discovered behind the apparently smooth functioning of society. In several self-portraits Büttner relates such contradictions to his own person and his role as a painter. He shocks the observer with tabu themes presenting exhibitionism and isolation. In the "Self-Portrait during a Camomile Inhalation" the artist hides himself,

thus disappointing the observer's curiosity and voyeurism. Behind these diverse forms of renunciation, withholding what is expected of the artist, one can perceive doubts that also manifest themselves in the deliberately "bad" painting and the deliberately trivial composition. Büttner calls the work of art per se into question, exploring how far the painter can go in working with this concept. In a series of pictures for the "von hier aus" exhibition, he made clear that his visual language and concept of art are not the outcome of personal problems but instead seek to question the nature of painting. The title of this series, "The Problems of Mini-Golf in European Painting", sounds both serious and cynical, and is directed against both theorizing art forms and theory-producing critics.

Albert Oehlen (born 1954) sets about his work in a similar fashion, and has frequently exhibited and created joint pictures together with Büttner. In many of his works he has incorporated mirrors in which the observer can recognise him- or herself as part of the picture. This direct link with the observer opens up the work to the context in which it is perceived. Art and society, and also art and individual experience, are the themes addressed here. In a statement about the inclusion of mirrors in a picture, Oehlen asserted: "The observer here recognises how beautiful art is, and how ugly he himself is". The fact that Oehlen eliminates utopian elements from his pictures raises the question of what they "positively" circumscribe as negations. Oehlen answers that question by way of a systematic avoidance, involving a wide range of contexts from the history of modern painting. In a series of pictures produced in 1985, utilising "the primary colours of red, white, and blue", he suggests a confrontation with theory as also pursued by Mondrian. With Oehlen though, that leads to the declaration: "Nothing signifies nothing".

Painting in Berlin

In 1978 a number of young artists – including Rainer Fetting, Helmut Middendorf, Salomé, and Bernd Zimmer – established the "Galerie am Moritzplatz", a self-help set-up in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin. Scarcely influenced by the international discussion of conceptual art which dominated in the Seventies, these artists developed a form of painting labelled "Violent Painting" which in the years that followed largely determined the image of the "Neo-Fauves". The links with the tradition of expressive painting, and particularly of German Expressionism, were clear. This was an art that extended traditions and at the same time refers to a contemporary attitude to life. The counterpole to such painting was to be found in the "Critical Realism" which ruled the Berlin art scene of the Seventies. That Critical Realism (Sorge, Petrick, Diehl) made use of the demasking techniques of such Twenties artists as Grosz, Heartfield, or Otto Dix, enriched with elements from Pop Art. That very technique of quotation made clear though that the criticism presented in this "realism" was "learnt", deriving from a well-worn pattern of good and evil. There was scarcely room for any really profound feeling, and the criticism ultimately illustrated well-known sweeping statements. The "violent painters" countered that with their extremely subjective experiences. Influenced by Hödicke, Koberling, and Lüpertz, they took it upon themselves to present their experience, wishes, and visions in pictures.

Salomé (Wolfgang Cilarz, born 1954) has operated since the late Seventies in the sphere of Performance Art, for the most part presenting (together with Luciano Castelli, a young Swiss artist living in Berlin) bizarre scenes of human dependences and relationships, often with elements of travesty. Photos and films of these scenes often provided the basis for Salomé's large and intensely coloured pictures whose painterly structure is primarily accentuated by way of violent gestures and a patchwork-like summation of areas of colour. Alongside the pictures devoted to self-presentation, Salomé frequently resorts to material from magazines. Homosexual subjects demonstrate their origins in the world of pornography, but at the same time they are "erotically" transformed through being painted as dream-images. Connections between an industrialised image of the body and self-presentation become apparent. Works referring to Monet's "Water Lilies", pictures illustrating scenes from Wagner's "Ring", and portraits of "important German ladies" indicate Salomé's attempts at extending his repertoire of themes. A link between the individual groups of works is established by the spontaneous style of painting which provides emotional intensification rather than calling the subject intellectually into question.

Rainer Fetting (born in 1949), who at present lives in Berlin and New York, fluctuates between extreme privacy and public declarations. His pictures often demonstrate connections with contemporary politics without them being intended as political statements. Fetting's "Van Gogh and Wall" series – a subject that he has also illustrated in a film – involves variations on a theme by Van Gogh (and of Francis Bacon): the painter's homecoming. This backward look at art history is, however, hauled into the present by way of its association with the "Berlin Wall" as a political factor. In his picture the painter describes everyday schizophrenia in the divided city of Berlin, in a world divided into East and West. That situation is used for presentation of the existential perplexity which receives expression in extreme painterly gestures and in the traces of helplessness which can be felt to characterise the composition. Fetting's private pictures, the portraits of himself and his friends, do, however, seek a degree of support in human relationships, even if for Fetting these "reflections" are constantly linked with elements of role-playing ("Klaus as an Arab" ...).

In his recent years at New York Fetting has deve-

loped a possibility of intensifying the impact of his painting by way of the incorporation of heavy wooden beams he found lying around. Faces, wolves, or excessively poeticised street scenes emanate depression and anxiety, and do not offer any indication of a new form of emotional support. Fetting's works create an ambivalent mood. They are determined by attraction and rejection, and fear is intermingled with fascination. Present-day uncertainties find expression in pictures of incantatory intensity.

Helmut Middendorf (born 1953) has discovered visual possibilities which use the subject-matter to link "violent painting" with general statements about our reality. That leads to pictures from the sub-culture ("Rock Star"), and also to visionary scenes which create their own poetic reality. Middendorf often succeeds in intensifying a picture's themes in such a way that they are capable of functioning as "Contemporary Icons". The insecurity of life in Berlin is caught in the figure of the "dangling man" whose body spans the sky over the big city. The artificial electronic paradise of discos is reflected in the ecstasy of the bodies depicted in "Electric Night". Middendorf often employs visual material from other media. A scene from Andrey Tarkovsky's film "Stalker" or the photo of a train can spark off a picture. The step from representation to symbol occurs during the process of painterly transposition. Painting creates a visionary space which is filled with evocative elements also indicative of the author's sensitivity.

At the centre of the "violent painting" produced by Fetting, Salomé, and Middendorf is a search for identity, for a visible connection between subjective experience, subject, and style. The extreme acting out of spontaneous visual thinking is intended to free a work from self-doubt. Such pictures are mainly meant to function as emotional facts.

Counter-positions have also developed in West Berlin from a variety of perspectives. *Peter Chevalier* has followed on from Italian Pittura metafisica and Surrealism. *Dieter Hacker* also turns to art history ("Beckmann, Matisse, and Picasso paint a woman") and is experimenting with painting full of dark and almost emotionally over-charged implications. Figurative traditions are further developed there whilst *Reinhard Pods, Ilja Heinig, and Katja Hajek* pursue gestural abstraction. Painter *ter Hell* senses a linking element in the opposition between these diverse possibilities, which is why he as it were establishes his work "above" such visual concepts. In such series of pictures as "Bezüge" ("References") he plays through various traditions of abstract painting. In his Graffiti Texts he declares: "Linear Thinking is Death". *Ina Barfuss* and *Thomas Wachweger* also constitute counter-voices to the primacy of "gestural expression", developing complex themes whilst often working together on pictures. Ina Barfuss discovers new and memorable expressions for male/female rituals of dominance and dependence without succumbing to the clichés of feminist self-limitations. Thomas Wachweger is mainly concerned with deformations characterising the present day and the (German) past. His pictures often approach the limits of pain and what is bearable, articulating in encoded forms what would rather remain suppressed or forgotten.

The Cologne Scene

In 1980 a number of Cologne artists, who became known as the "Mülheimer Freiheit" group (after its studio address), first presented themselves to the public. The group's members – Hans Peter Adamski, Peter Bömmels, Walter Dahn, Jiri Georg Dokoupil, Gerard Kever, and Gerhard Naschberger – came together (without any programme or binding conception) to try out new possibilities of spontaneous art production within the medium of painting. The pictorial concept that thus came to the fore is, however, fundamentally different from the ideas that determined the work of Berlin's "violent painters". The Mülheimer Freiheit artists were not primarily concerned with a search for identity by way of painting, but rather with its dissolution. Any style, any subject, could be pursued; and there was a great diversity of ideas about the necessity of pictures. The radicality of this aesthetic of "Everything is Possible" penetrated into individual works. Pictures were characterised by stylistic inconsistencies and montages of subject-matter. Juxtaposition extended to the making of art. The boundaries of subjectivity became blurred in group-pictures. Walter Dahn and Jiri Georg Dokoupil jointly attempted to paint with "a single brush" as a kind of "third person". Their series of shower pictures demonstrates that they saw this as a counter-strategy to their Berlin fellow-artists. This developed as a kind of paraphrase of Rainer Fetting's "Ricky under the shower", which was followed by "Rasputin", "a rat", "a tea-bag", and "a kitchen stove" – all "under the shower". Close co-operation between all the members of "Mülheimer Freiheit" mainly determined what they produced during the first two years. They then increasingly went their own ways, even though Dahn and Dokoupil time and again worked together once more ("Africa Pictures", "Endart Pictures").

Walter Dahn (born 1954) was the most closely involved during the Mülheimer Freiheit phase in the New Painting's links with the sub-cultural scene. His pictures were "punk-like" in their combination of aggressiveness and indifference. The fact that this attitude was ultimately a put-on "role" is demonstrated in later works where there is an obvious diminution of "wildness". To begin with the emphasis was on the principle of "anything goes", but then Dahn increasingly developed forms indicative of symbolic commitment. Paradoxically, that became apparent in his utilisation of a medium associated with the anarchy of

the everyday world. Dahn took up the technique of the spray picture with its links with American graffiti art. He did not, however, imitate its aesthetic but instead developed an antithesis. He placed huge "signets", which frequently quoted the works of other artists (such as Baselitz, Warhol, and Dokoupil), against an almost monochrome sprayed background. The fact that this visual concept also involves eclectic elements becomes apparent in a self-portrait where Dahn presents himself as a "Chinese African".

Jiri Georg Dokoupil (born 1954) has been the most consistent of all in presentation of the aesthetic principle of "Everything is Possible" in his various series of pictures. A first comprehensive survey of his work (at Essen's Folkwang Museum in 1984) had the impact of a "group exhibition by a single artist". Dokoupil's work single-mindedly plays through various pictorial concepts, revealing many references to the activities of Gerhard Richter. Richter, however, is always ultimately concerned with painting whereas Dokoupil extends the foundations for his work into a wide variety of areas. In a series of "Children's Pictures" he sets his sights on the theme of kitsch as a profound truth. In another series of pictures and objects he presents "Corporations & Products" by way of playful defamiliarisation of well-known company logos. The "Dummy Pictures" involve surreal scenes which also allude to today's trivialisation of the Super-Real. Whether his works refer to everyday aesthetics or art history, Dokoupil pushes himself into the centre of attention in the watercolours of the "Nose Bleeding" series. These works, quoting a pictorial genre by Francesco Clemente, confront the observer with the person of the artist whilst simultaneously insinuating that the "person" shown there is once again ultimately a pose.

Dokoupil's works are "without foundation" in a positive sense. They are "splendidly painted" but are not however concerned with "painting as painting". All the same, the demasking of everyday pictorial worlds and the negation of art cannot be viewed as a unifying attitude underlying Dokoupil's work. Not even the "Strategy of Affirmation", which has in the meantime developed from the "Revolution of Yes" to a practical fellow-traveller mentality, constitutes the focus of his ideas. Changing his standpoint from picture series to picture series, Dokoupil considers a possible subject from all sides without finally committing himself. This openness brings about fascination and at the same time an irritating form of indifference. Dokoupil's latest works are monochrome pictures concealing texts discoverable only by means of x-ray equipment.

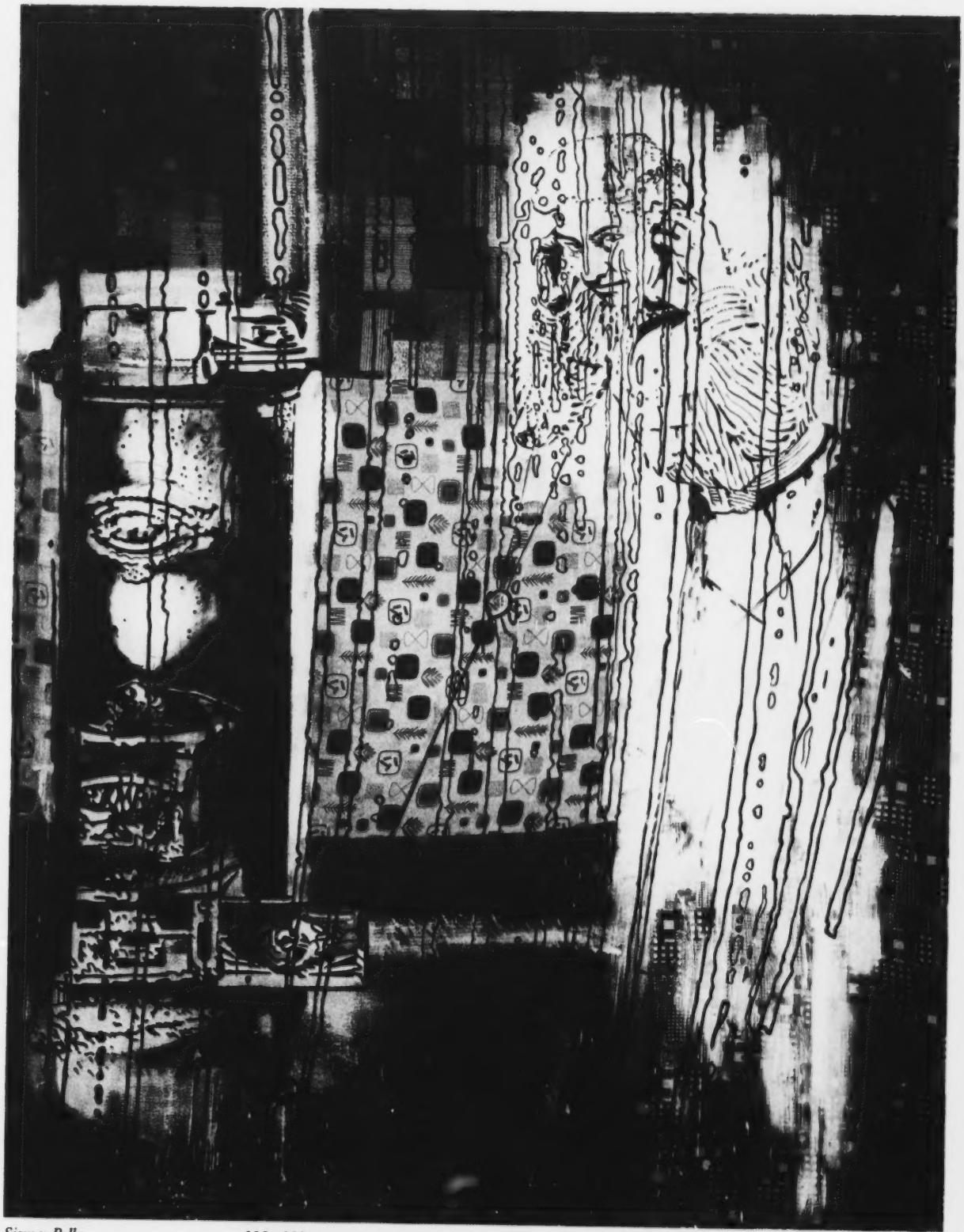
Hans Peter Adamski (born in 1947) has in recent years pushed his pictures to extremes in various ways. When his fellow-artists were indulging in violent colours, he withdrew into black and white pictures whose complicated figurations made decipherment difficult. In one of his exhibitions he presented transformed shaggy shepherds carpets as pictures. He embellished "abstract pictures" by sticking on rolls of burnt dough, which one critic relegated to the realm of "nauseating techniques". Adamski quotes Pop Art, Masereel's graphics, and the aesthetics of Tachisme – without establishing any ironic distance from his models but transforming them for his purposes. That principle of metamorphosis can be recognised in Adamski's pictures from the start. Also of importance perhaps is the fact that he views himself as an artist who – through painting – would like to become something other than a painter.

Peter Bömmels (born in 1951) belonged to the Mülheimer Freiheit from its early days even though he was self-taught and without any artistic training. That, however, provided Bömmels with a chance of putting his visions into effect without the handicap of preconceptions. Most of Peter Bömmels' paintings and sculpture are based on small drawings, which have the impact of diary jottings. The hallucinatory imagination that characterises these drawings is founded upon both the power of the unconscious and rational control. The artist has developed a dual procedure for his pictorial concept. On the one hand he makes use of techniques of free association, and on the other he further develops – by way of "logical" operations – the visual ciphers thereby discovered. Questions such as 'What would be completely out of place in conjunction with this aspect of the picture?' can influence construction just as much as reflections on new symbolism. Bömmels often links the visionary elements in his work with unusual techniques and presentations. In a series of "Hair Pictures" he depicted on a white ground figures whose outlines consisted of human hair stuck together. The emotional quality of the material intensifies his themes, accentuating their mysterious nature. The artist brought together verre églomisé pictures and paintings on processional banners in his "Showing Teeth of Light" exhibition (1985). The deliberate reference to local tradition (with Cologne cathedral playing an important part in Bömmels' inconography) and to the forms used in religious pictures increasingly pushes him into the role of an outsider whose difficult pictures depict a world filled with threats and transgressions. Bömmels believes that for such a world there cannot exist any pictures that are easy to read. A visual language that does justice to this world must come close to hermeticism.

Alongside Berlin, Cologne is the most important centre for current German painting. Apart from Dahn, Dokoupil, Adamski, and Bömmels, the former members of Mülheimer Freiheit, there are other painters who stimulate discussion of "pictures" from a great variety of perspectives. *Andreas Schulze* devotes himself to an abstract art whose huge, voluminous forms become the subject of his pictures without a specific meaning or readable significance becoming apparent. *Martin Kippenberger* plays through various possibili-

ties of grotesque demasking with many allusions to the kitsch world of the mass media and the media masses. *Stefan Szczesny* concentrates on "beautiful painting" which – untroubled by any doubts – takes up the visual forms of, say, a Henri Matisse and applies them to contemporary themes. *Volker Tannert* started out from a metaphorical interpretation of living conditions today, and developed pictures of historic landscapes that justly ask: "Who's afraid of the 19th century?"

"New German Painting" expresses a wide range of painterly and thematic possibilities. Unifying labels such as "Neo-Fauves" or "Neo-Expressionists" miss the mark. This painting may circle around "figurative expression" but a wide variety of directions fan out from that central preoccupation. The "human figure" offers an opportunity for developing a multitude of painterly attitudes rather than a new style. With passion and pathos, with coolness and cynicism, man is shown within the area of conflict of today's experiences. That involves pictures as ciphers of reality rather than the depiction of aspects of reality. The perspectives developed there depict a considerable diversity of "imaginings": painting in search of identity; painting as a dissolution of this identity; painting as a sign of crisis in art and society; and painting as hope and utopia. There are great differences between individual artistic standpoints, and in recent years they have led to fruitful discussions and rivalries, particularly between young painters. Widespread public interest in art has developed at the same time. The success of "New German Painting" is, however, also increasingly provoking counter-positions. A return to the tradition of 'Art informel' is at present to be observed in painting. Other artists are experimenting with work manifesting clear links with the conceptual preoccupations of the Sixties. A turning towards sculpture and installations is also apparent – and so too is an extension of the aesthetic "Everything is Possible" to all conceivable media and social relationships. The "cross-culture" practiced by the West Berlin "Endart" group and "Die Tödliche Doris" ("Deadly Doris") attempts to combine art and life, providing obvious opposition to the "Return to Painting". Increasing social appropriation does, however, face that painting with the danger of losing its immanent power of provocation.



Sigmar Polke,
Lumpi hinter dem Ofen
(Lumpi behind the Stove),
1983,

325 x 250 cm
(Photo: Mary Boone Gallery,
New York/
Galerie Werner, Cologne)

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A. R. Penck,
New York, New York,
1984,
248 x 880 cm
(Photo: Galerie Werner, Cologne)

Jörg Immendorff,
Akademie Ost – Aufgabe
Hans Albers,
1984,
285 x 400 cm
(Photo: Galerie Werner, Cologne)

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Georg Baselitz, Nachtessen in Dresden (Supper in Dresden), 1982, 280 x 450 cm (Photo: Galerie Werner, Cologne)

G. L. Gabriel, An der Straße (At the Roadside), 1982, 190 x 190 cm (Photo: Galerie Poll, Berlin)

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Lambert Maria Wintersberger, Pink Buddha, 1985, 190 x 225 cm (Photo: Galerie Poll, Berlin)

Dieter Hacker,
Rote Erde (Red Earth),
1985,
192 x 286 cm

(Photo: J. Littkemann)

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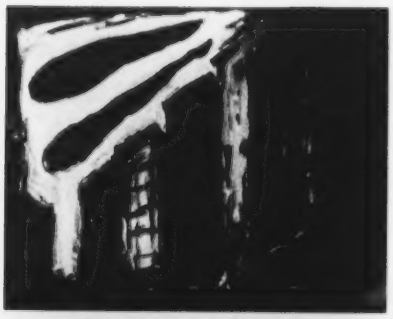

Helmut Middendorf,
Oranienstraße,
1985,
180 x 230 cm
(Photo: J. Littkemann)

Rainer Fetting,
Self with Red Hat,
1985,
175 x 140 cm
(Photo: Galerie
Raab, Berlin)

Walter Dahn,
Die nutzlose Passion/
Schlangenbeißer
(The Useless Passion/
Snake-Biter),
1986,
250 x 180 cm
(Photo: Galerie
Maenz, Cologne)

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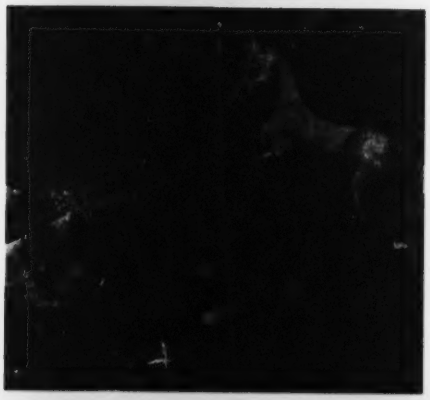
Jiri Georg Dokoupil, Nosebleeding (Self Portrait), 1984, 55 x 38,5 cm (Photo: Galerie Maenz, Cologne)



Peter Chevalier, Lied der Muschel (Song of the Shell), 1984, 220 x 240 cm (Photo: Galerie Raab, Berlin)

Peter Chevalier, Ideale Landschaft IX (Ideal Landscape IX), 1985, 81 x 100 cm (Photo: Galerie Raab, Berlin)

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Karl Horst Hödicke,
Ausverkauf
(Sale),
1964,
150 x 97 cm
(Photo: Galerie Poll, Berlin)

Markus Lüpertz,
Der Morgen (Morning),
1981,
250 x 330 cm
(Photo: Galerie Werner, Cologne)

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Markus Lüpertz,
Der Abend (Evening),
1981,
250 x 330 cm
(Photo: Galerie Werner, Cologne)

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Anselm Kiefer,
Dionysius Aeropagita –
Die Ordnung der Engel
(Dionysius Aeropagita –
The Hierarchy of Angels),
1978/82,
330 x 555 cm
(Photo: Galerie Maenz, Cologne)

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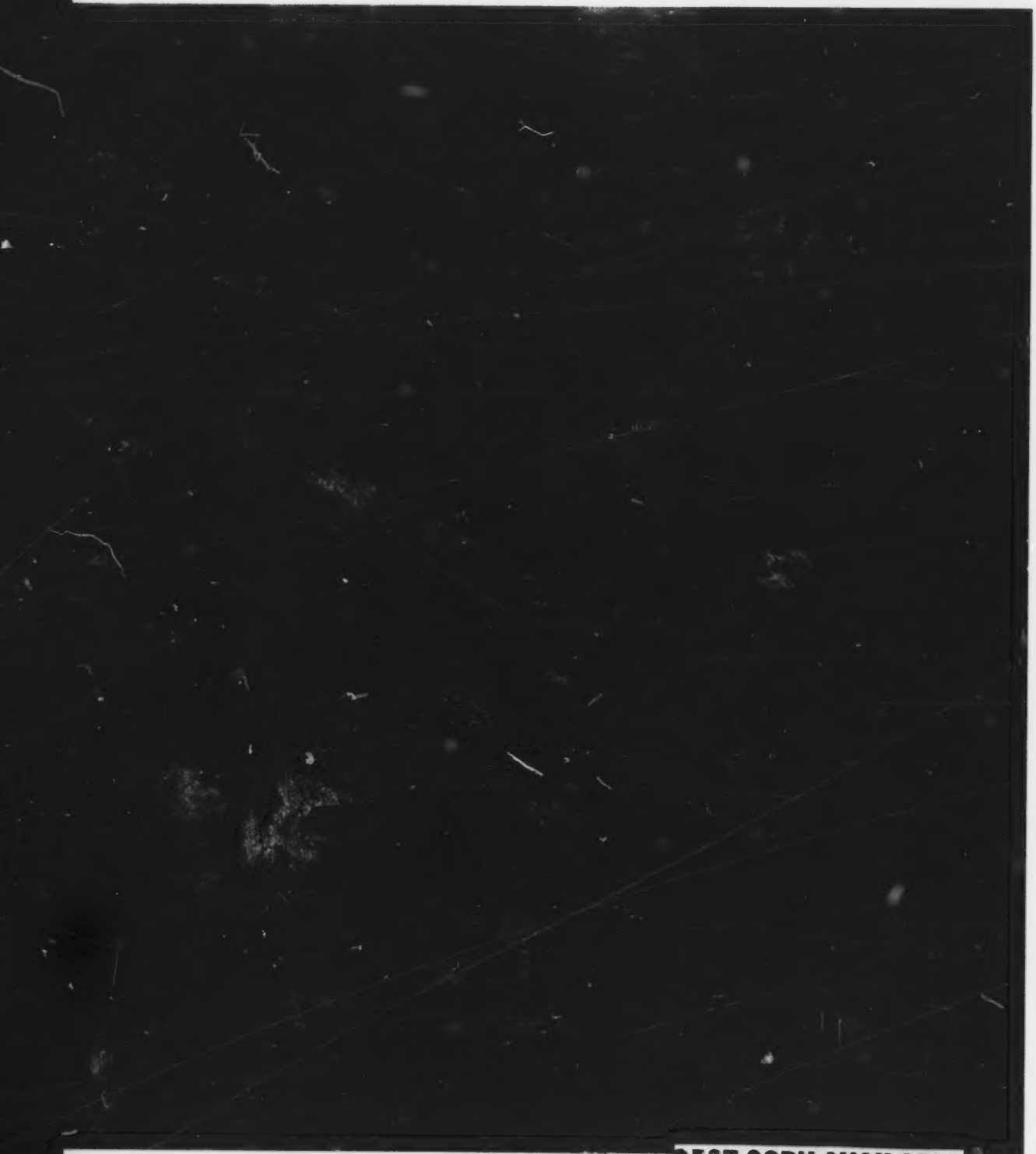

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Peter Bömmels,
Die Entlarvungsstation
(The Place of
Unmasking),
1984,
260 x 210 cm
(Photo:
Galerie Maenz, Cologne)

ter Hell,
Untitled,
1983,
220 x 290 cm
(Photo: Galerie Fahnemann,
Berlin)

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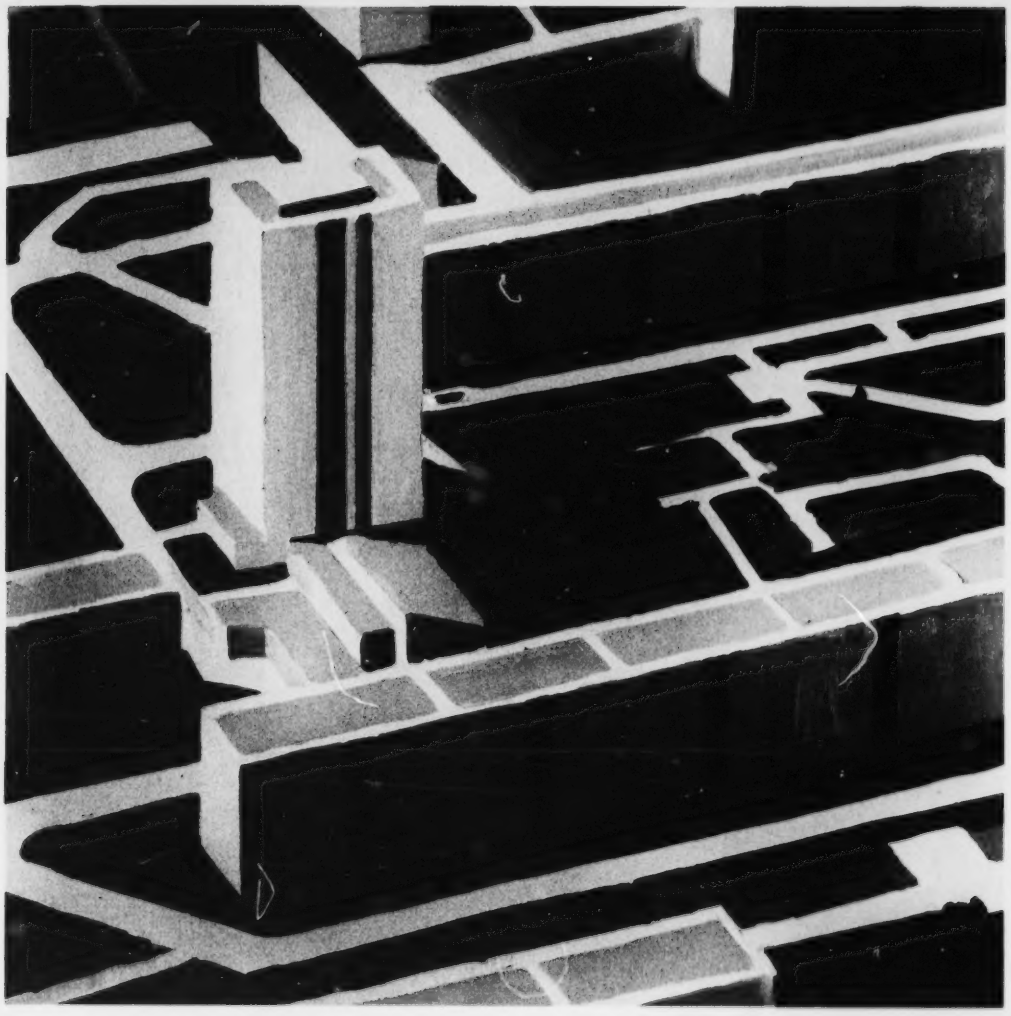

Gerhard Richter,
Fiat G 51,
1963,
130 x 200 cm
(Photo:
Galerie Zwirner,
Cologne)

Gerhard Richter,
Stadtbild SL 3
(City Picture SL 3),
1969,
124 x 124 cm
(Photo: Galerie
Zwirner,
Cologne)

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Dietrich Mahlow

Constructivism and Realism – on the Fringe

30

Is Constructivism still to be found on today's art scene in the Federal Republic of Germany? To come straight to the point: Topicality is not an issue that concerns constructivist art, which involves the basic principles of seeing that only change slowly and are therefore never "of topical interest". Constructivist art occurs more or less unnoticed, and people usually only discover it long after it has come into being, but its impact is lasting since it is concerned with the precondition for any contemporary interpretation of life, any trend, and any style; with seeing per se; and with transforming seeing, visual thought, and reactions to light and colour. If we ask how modern art has changed our seeing, the answer primarily comes from constructivist art, making use of knowledge of scientific and socio-political interrelationships, and of contemporary techniques and technologies. Its "tools" are knowledge and skills. In order to develop an art out of that a Constructivist must possess the ability to summarize his experiences and give them visual form.

If one follows the concept of function, spread across the world by the "Bauhaus", into the Fifties in both Europe and America, observing its modifications by such people as Max Bill who directed the Ulm College of Design established after the war as an official successor, one sees that visual thinking by then sought fundamental structures rather than the form appropriate for a specific function. The models for methodical thinking in constructivist art are particularly to be found in the interconnections within mathematical structures. The view that life is based on algebra and geometry – rather than this art being related to life – can be countered by the fact that systematic processes can lead in visual spheres to completely unexpected results. That is particularly the case when two methods are compared or clash, or when intuition and chance are involved.

Today constructivist artists also incorporate destruction in their constructions, deploying materials as a partner – not utilised for specific purposes but rather encountered in ever-changing constellations in terms of reactions and differing thought-processes. Such thought-processes can proceed systematically or also freely, as in Picasso's "constructions"; they can allow chance to play a part, tolerate opposing impulses, and come close to a collage approach.

In the Seventies constructivist art became increasingly concerned with perception – and that process is continuing. Constructivist artists are today interested in both geometrical form and, even more, its relationship with perception. An artist might, for instance, investigate geometry in limitless space where it is unavoidably relativised. Einstein referred to the relativity of time and space whilst constructivist artists relativise geometrical forms.

Geometrical forms time and again make their appearance in all cultures. Constructivist art perhaps involves the staking out of a way on which man can then move more freely. Is the combination of art and mathematics thus a means of assistance towards freedom of vision and imagination, towards bold but well-founded (i. e. effective) ideas – and thus also towards fantasy? Reflection on our structures of perception has expanded the concept of constructivist art. Objective perception does not exist any more than objective measurement of time. Constructivist artists have entered upon an Einsteinian age of form, which provides an additional demonstration that their intellect plays a greater part in perception than used to be the case. Their thinking participates in seeing and also reflects on the observer's participation. The original meaning of construction entailed assembly or fitting together whereas for today's artists the emphasis is on an increase in thinking's share in seeing and doing.

If the impact of art is to bring about an experience – which is not easily achieved with constructivist art –, then this also always involves experiencing perception of one's own thinking. In other words, reflection. This thinking is not ideological, idealistic, or scien-

tific in nature, but absolutely visual and artistic, prior to any possible verbal contents.

The great discovery to be made among today's small fringe groups of Constructivists is that there exist pictures and visual works for abstract thinking, for reflections, and for completely concrete ideas with all the accompanying discontinuities and inhibitions; diversities of impulse, condition, and dependence; emotionally-suffused considerations; and comparisons ranging between the critical and the excessively critical.

Outsiders? Are they really outsiders, the people who want to make clear to us something about space? What is space? What is empty space? Does perspective, which we, after all, only know here on our earth, exist up there? Does an artist like *Gerhard Schweizer,* who relates the forms of the early Suprematists to today's knowledge of space and creates constructions for a person with 360° vision as if the entire head were an eye, show us the kind of all-round perspective that would be experienced by astronauts in the emptiness of space if geometrical bodies wandered around there? What kind of space exists up there at all? Where are comparisons with the earth permissable and adequate, and where not?

Space exists in relationship to time – and *Günther Uecker, Vera Röhm,* and *Bernd Klötzer* are concerned with the depiction of time. They are seeking a concept of time appropriate for us today. Vera Röhm is searching for a new sun-dial, a contemporary gnomon, rather than the baroque phenomenon. Can time be experienced by way of lines? She thus measures the shadows thrown while the sun is rising and setting whilst Uecker continues to capture bursts of light in his nail constructions. Are these impulses of time turning in circles?

Do not space and time uniquely depend, however, on light which precedes them? And if the human eye is the correlate of the sun, does not time then depend on our seeing? Like space? *Heinz Mack* is constantly preoccupied with that question. Mention should also be made here of *Diet Sayler;* and *Adolf Luther* penetrates ever further into the incorporeal substance of light. Luther investigates the phenomenon of light itself as being the only and fundamental precondition for what we call our world. With him reflection (in a mirror) becomes reflection (thought). Thinking here entails reflecting – but reflecting on several levels, in many dimensions no longer geometrically ordered: thinking in space, thinking no longer as a temporal sequence but within a space full of diverse energies and impulses, constantly in movement, and in diametrically opposed directions too. Leaps forwards and backwards through time are the norm, as in dreams. Sensing, recognising, remembering, associating, defending oneself, feeling and objectifying, thinking, and experiencing are all involved in learning to experience.

Would "Experience" perhaps be the best characterisation of constructivist art today? – in terms of seeing, experiencing the seeing, reflecting on and living through the experience, talking about and comparing what has been lived through, and thereby shaping experiences which influence life. That sounds very simple. It is simple too – and that is why it is so difficult to construct. That can only be achieved by artists who also know something, are aware of the processes of seeing and do not merely isolate their material, ask themselves questions about light and colour, and are spatially experienced too: artists who have experienced knowledge and perception. *Erwin Heerich, Thomas Lenk, Heinz Günter Prager* and the "Brunswick Constructivists 1984", *Ansgar Nierhoff, Eberhard Fiebig,* and *Erich Reusch* continue to be active in this kind of sculptural construction, and they were recently joined by *Peter Werner. Klaus Staudt* and *Georg Pfahler* have been working in that way in painting for decades; and *Imi Knöbel* unites constructivist sculpture and painting in his coloured reliefs. *Reiner Ruthenbeck, Rebecca Horn,* and *Katharina Fritsch* also construct areas whose theme is the energies within space and lived domains. Rebecca Horn attempts to combine both space and lived domains so as to present an active inner realm to our imagination with its conditions and limits, times and possibilities of expansion, and the dangers of ossification.

Alfonso Hüppi – whose "Uncubings" ("Entwürfelungen") series of boxes was produced as long ago as 1976 but is only now becoming known – is not a constructivist artist in the usual sense. He is concerned with the confrontation between perception and construction, between geometry, wood, and eye where our seeing creates mathematics. The field of vision involved in perspective becomes a point of view even where that can no longer be substantiated. Should that mean that anyone who thinks he sees things rightly from his present position is taken to the point of absurdity? Hüppi's boxes hold a drama in the balance. Is the eye an instrument of thinking and every form a thought?

Wolfgang Schmidt has devoted himself for over 20 years to the construction of the human figure, to human cyphers that he calls signs of life. Construction of the human figure dates back a long way – through Le Corbusier's "modulor" to Schlemmer's "triadic ballet" with the sources of stimulus deriving from Kleist's "Marionette Theatre", Albrecht Dürer and Leonardo da Vinci, back to the Ancient Egyptians. Wolfgang Schmidt is less concerned with general proportions than with a module that can be valid for peoples of all cultures and for symbols expressing both outer and inner movements.

Today's constructivist artists may have qualified the art of Suprematism and Constructivism but at the same time they have perceived, combined, and made experienceable knowledge and action, sensation, and

life and reflection in constantly new ways. That increasingly involves methodical experiment devoted to the experience of our perception.

Realism is still basically centred on Berlin, even though other important representatives of this style live in other Federal German cities or, like Peter Klasen, in Paris.

Realism is not concerned with the figurative quotations of the Neo-Fauves but with something that began ... – Yes, with whom and when? With Albrecht Dürer and Renaissance artists' claim to fidelity to nature? Dürer's almost microscopic study of nature always underwent a metamorphosis in his pictures and did not involve scientific determinacy. Today's metamorphoses are completely different in character. They are interpretations. Nature itself no longer plays such a great part as used to be the case. Even such a painter as *Manfred Bluth*, who once again takes classical models as a starting-point, is more interested in the "scene" than the scenery. Romanticism does not serve as an essential exemplar either, and anyone expecting a comparison with the New Objectivity of the Twenties will seek in vain. Or does, say, *Miriam Munsky* discover a precursor in Schad, *Klaus Staeck* and *Klaus Vogelgesang* in Heartfield, *Peter Tripp* in Kanoldt or Klapheck, and *Klaus Fussmann* in Morandi? Despite a great diversity of stimuli they all go their own ways, and are scarcely comparable with one another.

Man is their great theme. Even if only objects are depicted in a picture and man is absent, he is still today's theme. There does not exist any reality per se but only and always the actuality of human beings with their differing truths. There has been a perceptible increase in understanding of and penetration into interrelationships and the movements induced by multiple energies, and also in recognition that reality is the world in ourselves and our power of imagination. To begin with, many people believe that they see reality as it "really" is, but then they get to know themselves as they are: in no way to be described clearly and unambiguously. Everyone sees the world in a different way, and everyone experiences events differently. Reality is always a subjective interpretation: in word and image, in writing and language. Realistic pictures thus also have their subjective reality, and everyone interprets them differently.

An example from an experience accessible to everyone. You are sitting in a café opposite a medium-sized window. The glass is divided into eight parts by a relatively broad mullioned frame. Through the lower part of the window you can see the facade of a mediaeval church in the distance. Someone says: "Look at the cathedral"; and someone else: "Just look at this window with the good old mullions and transoms" – without seeing the church. And a third person starts describing the church in detail without taking any notice of the window, and then he suddenly diverges into talking about the part played by the church in colonialism.

Realistic art is an interpretation of what has been seen, the most accurate depiction of scenes possible so that they are recognisable to the highest degree. Recognition certainly belongs together with memory. There thus come into being possibilities of comparison which one does not normally have – thanks to art and realistic painting. The prime art of realism entails description. Such artists can be broadly categorised as those who seek objective accuracy and those who see what they want to see – even though they too will say we are painting what we see since nowhere does man demonstrate greater skill than in manipulation of his perceptions. "Interest" distracts attention without this being noticed. That is why Kant spoke of "disinterested" satisfaction in art, which Nietzsche rejected 50 years later as being a "sullying" of art when he wrote:

> "True to life?" How on earth does one start?
> Was ever nature captured in man's art?
> The least bit of our world is beyond seizing
> So our artist finally paints just what he finds pleasing.
> And what is that? Only what his modest skill can impart.

One can therefore only recognise and realistically reproduce the surrounding world when one knows oneself. The precondition for description is observation of both nature and oneself. Among artists dedicated to description there are some who are completely occupied with their subject whilst others are extremely self-preoccupied with regard to the way their imaginations penetrate the theme, the section of reality.

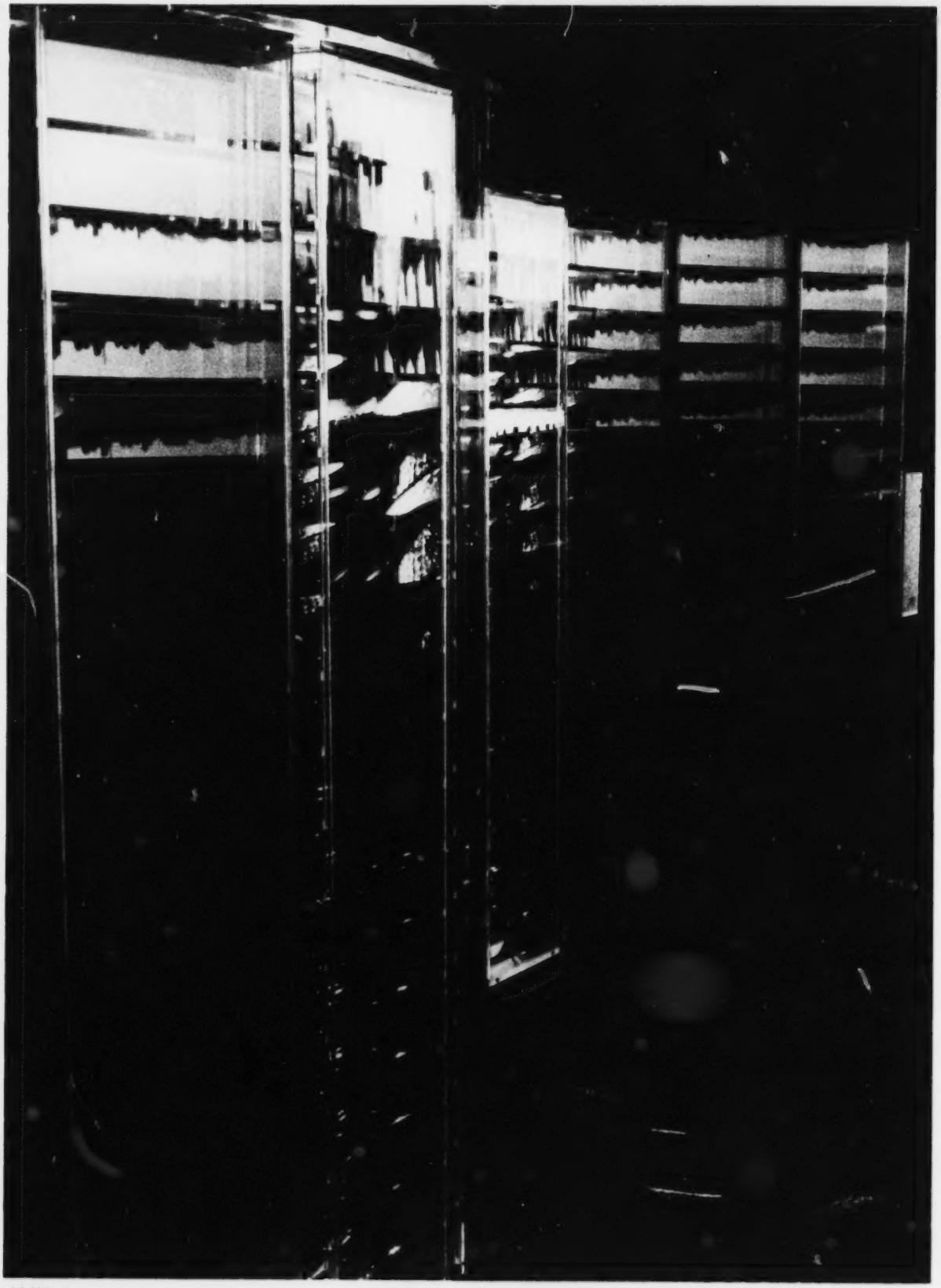
That comes close to Surrealism. Are there also ways of seeing that open up insights, traces of illumination? And what can be illuminated there? Interrelationships of course. The pictures of artists who spark off a wave of thought-provoking movements thus become ever more interesting to the degree that they depict our relationships with things. In Realism we see with artists' eyes as nowhere else in art. They show us a complex, multi-layered reality which is constantly changing. Nothing can be pinned down once and for all. Many connections are involved. And that is true to a considerably greater extent when a human being is involved.

Description is accompanied by taking sides, advocacy, accentuation, emphasis, and manipulation. The question of manipulation is important because it also entails falsification. Does photography thus make use of its authenticity for telling lies because it only presents part of the picture and because one does not see what is happening round about, so that what we do see is perhaps changed into its opposite? How can we therefore talk about realistic art at all if there does not exist any clear-cut truth of reality? Precisely

because Realism involves an affirmation of one-sidedness whilst recognising plurality. Only then can an artist like *Johannes Grützke* treat human beings ironically to the point of grotesqueness, or *Hermann Albert* contradict reality by parodying it. All politically and socially committed artists – and that continues to be the majority –reveal interrelationships which are meant to expand the observer's ideas and make a moral impact on him.

There do not as yet exist any reliable evaluative criteria for realistic painting. Ultimately the fact is that a picture only comes into being in our head. It changes our view of reality, which is in fact a kind of experience. It is art that brings us to this experience – not Realism or Surrealism, Constructivism, Expressionism, or any of the other Isms, but modern art, born out of our time as that power which allows seeing to become an experience. Allowing the seeing of more or less realistically painted reality to become an experience is achieved by way of exaggerations. Precision of detail is also an exaggeration, which perhaps exerts an even more intense impact in pictures that are assembled collage-style on the basis of photography – as produced ever more effectively by *Peter Sorge*, and constructed by *Fritz Köthe* and *Jürgen Waller* or *Miriam Munsky*. Despite or perhaps just because of the "coldness" of her representations, Munsky achieves a degree of inner involvement which makes it possible to talk about whatever is depicted without any ideological approach being prescribed. *Klaus Fussmann* employs gestural strokes in his application of expressiveness to things. *Wolfgang Petrick* and *Hans-Jürgen Diehl* dissect, uncover, and coarsen the human being. There remain questions to ourselves.

Young *Heike Ruschmeyer* combines reality and dream in realistic rather than surrealistic fashion. The dream, the soaring and subsiding of wishes, are seen as part of the everyday. *Peter Klasen* locks up the world in heavy goods vehicles, and all we are left with are the doors. Where do you want to go? And who wants to come along? One never arrives. No-one goes on the journey either, and there is also nothing in the lorries. Just signs, prohibitions, locks, packaging, bindings, levers, and supports: Nothing else. What are we all driving around with such importance? Ourselves? And what is the reality of thinking? Where does a controlling consciousness stand over subjective art? Where is reflection on realistic art incorporated in pictures? Reality is photographically reproduced in some pictures, but at the same time it is subjected to multiple reflection and refraction so that the observer must be sceptical about what he sees. Doubt becomes a part of realistic seeing here. And when someone takes the next step away from one-sided depiction towards partial presentation of several contexts inclusive of reflection about them and oneself – as young *Holger Bunk* does – then the artist seems to be one step ahead already. He (or she) has comprehended the incompleteness of our knowledge and can give form to that. He (she) shows us that the irrational and the constant fraud involved in both unintentional and deliberate distortion of reality are a part of our actuality.



Adolf Luther,
Energetische Plastik "Sinuskurve"
("Sinus Curve", Energy Sculpture),
1985,
Concave Mirror/Plexiglass
(Photo: Adolf Luther)

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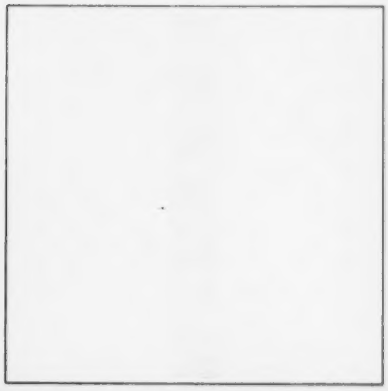
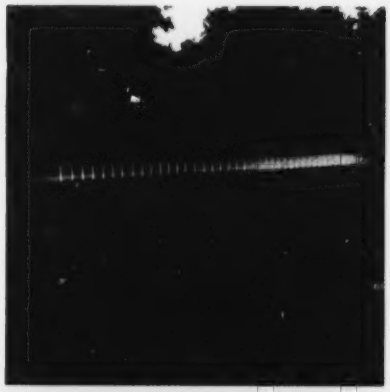
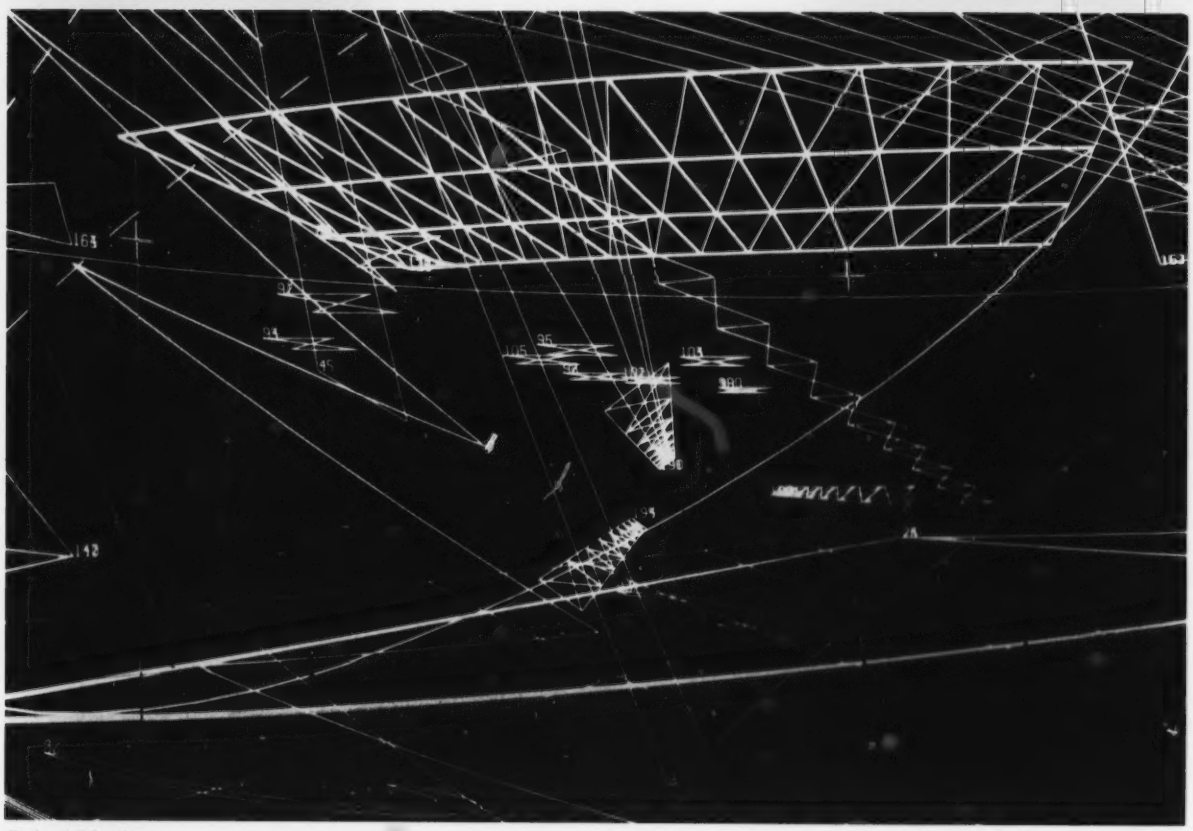
Diet Sayler, raumlicht (spacelight), 1982, Plexiglass/Steel (Photo: Diet Sayler)

Diet Sayler, Schraffuren (Hatching), 1977 (Photo: Diet Sayler)



Diet Sayler raumlicht (spacelight), 1982, Plexiglass/Steel (Photo: Diet Sayler)





Gerhard Schweizer, Strukturen im leeren Raum (Structures in Empty Space), 1985, Computer-Backed Graphics (Photo: Gerhard Schweizer)

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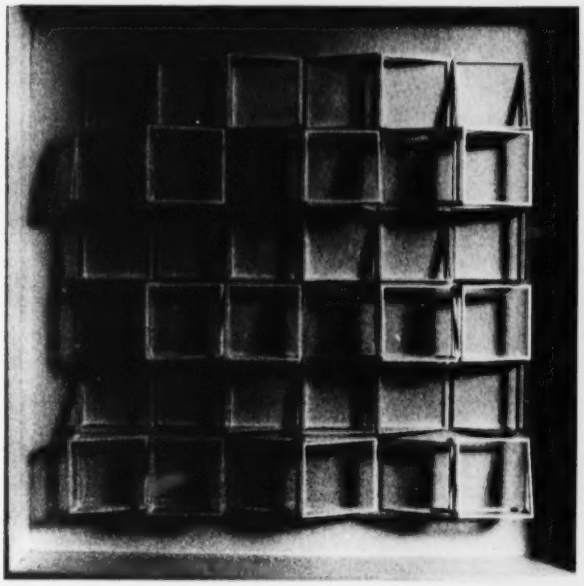
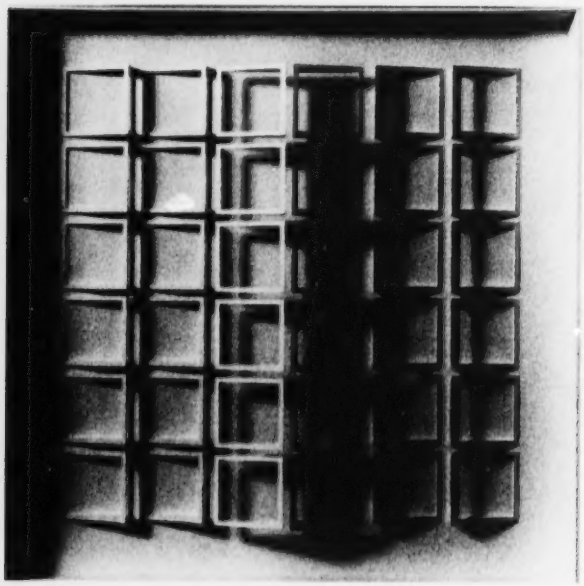
Klaus Staudt,
Schattengitter 9
(Shadow Lattice 9),
1983,

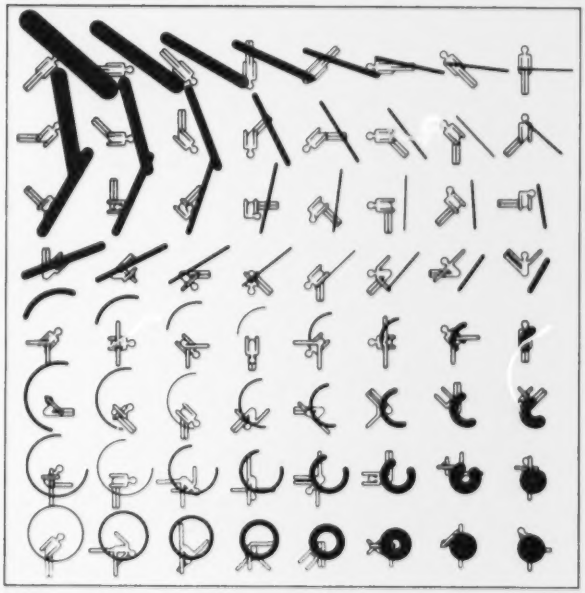
Assemblage,
100 x 100 x 12 cm
(Photo: Klaus Staudt)



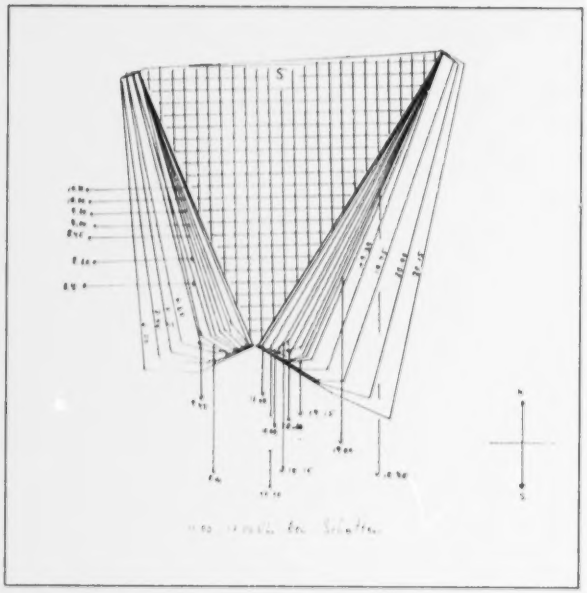
Klaus Staudt,
Architektonisch
(Architectonic),
1986,

Assemblage,
82 x 82 x 10,5 cm
(Photo: Klaus Staudt)





Wolfgang Schmidt,
Lebenszeichen
(Signs of Life),
1982
(Photo: Dietrich Mahlow)



Vera Roehm,
Schattenzeitlinien
(Shadow Time Lines),
1984
(Photo: Dietrich Mahlow)

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Maina-Miriam Munsky, Signale (Signals), 1973, *110 x 120 cm (Photo: Inter Nationes-Archiv)*

Malte Sartorius, Verschnürte Palme III (Trussed Palm III), 1976, 137 x 100 cm (Photo: Katalog "Realistische Zeichnungen"/ IFA/Stuttgart)

Heike Ruschmeyer, Bolero, 1983/85, 240 x 92 cm (Photo: Heike Ruschmeyer)

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Peter Klasen, Hebel auf blauem Grund M 4 (Lever on Blue Ground M 4), 1985, 146 x 116 cm (Photo: Dietrich Mahlow)

Hans-Jürgen Diehl, Die Abstrahlenden (Radiating), 1986 (Photo: Hans-Jürgen Diehl)

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Stephan von Wiese

Art as Intervention in the Human Sphere – Works Transcending Traditional Forms

The "Expanded Concept of Art" propagated by Joseph Beuys attained great importance in the artistic activity of the Sixties and Seventies. Attacks against traditional forms of art, labelled "bourgeois", became more intense and weighty with the "Fluxus" movement at the start of the Sixties. The work of art was no longer supposed to hang on walls as decorative embellishment. It no longer presented itself as a sculpturally self-sufficient ideal form, but now constituted an area of existence involving the observer and making immediate demands on his imagination, creativity, and participation. These artistic "Areas", "Ambiences", "Environments", and "Installations" (to use just some of the terms employed for this expanded comprehension of art) represented alternative projects aimed at countering misguided developments and deplorable aspects of social reality – to which the Sixties political rebellion had also endeavoured to draw attention.

A yearning for primordiality became a motive driving artists towards cultlike behaviour, Happenings, and other campaigns. Mythical thinking was rediscovered. In myth artists saw at work primordial and unfalsified powers and energies from the history of humanity and their objective was to make visible or activate those forces within art. Such thinking led to a turning away from one's own society, as discerned by Claude Levi-Strauss in his "Tristes Tropiques". This contemplation of primordial traditions entailed a turning towards non-European cultures and ways of thought, which had been forgotten as a result of over-valuation of Western civilisation. Some of these invocatory, myth-oriented projects will be presented here. Each throws light on the intentions of artists who, fashioned like "shamans" or scientific researchers, proceed like ethnologists or provide backing for their works as ecologists or mythologists. With their category-dissolving, tradition-disrupting concept of art, such artists seek to intensify, expand, and transform their own senses and those of the observer. A quotation from Mircea Eliade, historian of religion and researcher into myths, may help clarify the motives that have led a number of artists to a coming to terms with "non-Western" cultures: "The effort we devote to adequately understanding ways of thinking alien to the Western rationalist tradition, primarily involving the decoding of myths and symbols, will be rewarded with a crucial expansion of our consciousness ... Confrontation with 'the other' helps Western man gain a better understanding of himself".

On December 23, 1978, *Joseph Beuys* published (in the "Frankfurter Rundschau") his "Call to Alternative Action", addressed to "all human beings in the European sphere of culture and civilisation", envisioning a "breakthrough into a new social future" whose power of renewal was intended to dismantle the walls between East and West and to fill in the gulfs between North and South. Anyone who participated in this task, helping shape this work of art designated by Beuys as "social sculpture", could then experience and recognise him- or herself as "a creative being, determining the world". Beuys thus spoke of everyone being an artist who had to participate in the shaping of the "social body" "so that transformation might be completed as quickly as possible". Transformation involved non-violent change of the human being and society. Beuys' *oeuvre* is therefore also to be viewed as "transformation". The materials which the artist presented to eye, ear, and in fact all the senses were everyday natural materials: fat, felt, refuse, skins, slates, generators, pumps, and clay. By bringing them together he threw light on such polar opposites as warmth and coldness, receiver and transmitter, birth and death, female and male, and organic and crystalline. The material takes on symbolic significance beyond the everyday nature of its functional utilization – and it is that symbolic significance which initiates understanding and thus transforms reality. When in 1977 Beuys filled an unfriendly arcade in Münster with tallow, his "Primal Sledge/Tallow Heat Sculpture" drew attention to the immanent aesthetic needs of passers-by, much afflicted by the reality of the built environment. Warm, nourishing materials, stearin and fat, were intended to compensate for such aesthetic deprivation, thereby transforming the situation.

This mythical language of energies and powers, which are in harmony with nature and, when creatively employed, can initiate a transformation of society, received concentrated expression in a summation of Beuys' work at the Capodimonte National Museum in Naples at the end of 1985. After a life of arduous wanderings, the artist as great anarchistic transformer here symbolically furnished his own burial-place with such projects as "Palazzo Regale" and "I Believe". The

exhibition showcases contained "relics of rituals pointing towards a nature myth ultimately concerned with endowing alternative thinking with a sensory foundation, allowing reason and emotion to permeate one another, and linking past and future" (Armin Zweite). Beuys' works were thus – as he himself once said – "earth stations emanating something of a metaphysical and spiritual nature".

How can the destruction and devastation which modern technologies have brought about through war and economic exploitation in primordial and hitherto largely untouched landscapes be made at all visible? In his work *Rainer Wittenborn* has summarised all the artistic techniques accessible to him and all the non-artistic material – ranging from the mass media by way of advertising to cartography – in order to present the extent of devastation in Vietnam, South America, and Canada. In the late Sixties and early Seventies he was fully occupied with the bombing war in Vietnam, and then he turned to industrial destruction of the landscape along Canada's river estuaries and in Amazon jungle areas where the life-environment of the last primitive peoples is threatened with annihilation. In this highly scholarly documentation of economic and political processes, suffering man, whose culture and environment are under threat here, is not visible. The artist is instead interested in objective depiction of these threatened people's lifestyles. The observer's sensitivity and involvement are aroused by the rationality of method and objectivity with which the pictures are assembled rather than by emotionally disturbing forms of representation. The montage of facts, gathered on research journeys, produces pictures which lead to knowledge. The facts themselves finally speak against and unmask whatever is involved. In his ecologically-oriented concepts of art, Wittenborn has increasingly renounced individual artistic composition. His visual documentation of declining cultures, equipped with diverse authentic materials, is perhaps an adequate contemporary "historical painting".

Hamburg artist *Lili Fischer* views her presentations – such as the "Plant Conferences" where she investigates herbs' healing powers, or questionings of the public supposed to supply her with information about the associations surrounding specific plants – as drawing attention to the magical powers dwelling within nature. Utilising ritual gestures, texts, and pre-prepared plants, Lili Fischer disseminates her ideas about nature magic and mythical energies almost as if this were a school lesson for a group of listeners. When she seeks to track down the magical knowledge that nature, like a great encoded book, has in store, this action involves indicating the sources of a largely vanished mythology of nature. Implementation of this shamanistic knowledge – presented in Castaneda's Don Juan books as authentic experience obscuring the boundaries between truth and fiction – nevertheless remains a reconstruction. This invocation of nature magic also gives expression to the artist's autonomously primaeval position, an individual mythology established between ecological thinking, artistic field research, and New Age witchcraft.

Harald Szeemann's 1972 documenta 5 characterised the activities of artists who "establish their own signs and symbols particularly powerfully, viewing these as the world" as "individual mythologies". The works of *Michael Buthe*, based in Cologne and Marrakesh, also belong there. His contribution to the 1972 documenta was called "Homage to the Sun", and this tent-area of subdued dyed fabrics became a private cult environment created by the artist out of memories and acquisitions during a trip to Morocco. "A Journey to the Orient" was the title of a 1973 installation at the Oppenheim Gallery in Cologne. In 1976 Buthe declared his entire studio to be a holy place, the "Musée du Echnaton". A large number of similar installations and activities followed. They all marked the artist's turning away from the rationalisms of Western society. In his espousal of earlier cultures, particularly those of the Orient and Black Africa, Buthe reflects their myths, cults, rituals, and magical thinking without, however, wanting to go so far as to reproduce these myths. His individual myth is rather directed towards invoking and uncovering creative powers. Making use of modern forms of expression – such as collage and montage – and deploying "poor" materials as in Dadaism and Arte Povera, Buthe constructs an autonomous world of art and spirit where fantasy, ecstasy, and exuberance are opposed to the wasting away of a rationalised world.

Lothar Baumgarten lived among the Yanomani Indians on the Upper Orinoco for almost two years. Since that time the region's Indian traditions have been the subject of his work. Like an ethnographer, he describes landscape, flora, and fauna, listing the many species of trees and animals in the tropical forests, and telling Europeans about Indian tribal myths and customs. In his book "The Names of Trees" ("Die Namen der Bäume") the artist quotes Amerigo Vespucci, discoverer of the continent, who wrote towards the end of the 15th century: "The country is very pleasant and full of infinitely many trees. Sometimes the sweet scent of grasses and flowers, the taste of fruits and roots, are so wonderful that I can imagine being close to paradise on earth". When Lothar Baumgarten came to this land in 1978, he discovered what was already virtually a "paradise lost" of whose abundance he would like to make us once again conscious. He does that by, for instance, listing the names of 50 Indian tribes on the walls of the Mönchengladbach Museum, thereby establishing a monument to these vanishing peoples. He also paid tribute to them at the 1984 Venice Biennale by naming the names of the conquered continent of "America" and of the rivers of Venezuela. By inscribing the

topography of Venezuela (Little Venice) in the floor of the German Pavilion and filling the chisel-marks with the red the Indians use for body-painting, known to artists as Venetian Red, he "sunk the topographical structure of the Amazon in Venice's lagoon". Insignia-like animal symbols – jaguar, tortoise, eagle, and caiman – bring back to mind the original myths of the Indian tribe among whom the author lived.

Isolde Wawrin's "individual mythology" is also very closely linked with traditional Amerindian painting. Using great strips of white paper, or working directly with wall plaster as in cave painting, the artist employs her fingers to create hieroglyphic signs where one can decipher symbolisations of animals, plants, and human beings. Some of these motifs – coyotes, herons, and wolves – seem to derive from Indian legends whilst others are autobiographical. One of the painter's first works was an Indian-style painted tent which could also be displayed as a painting, but such references to Indian culture are principally of a formal nature. The pictorial script is not based on ethnological research or any personal encounter with Indian experience of the world. These individual symbolic forms are more likely to arise in the course of painting. They are process-like in character, and that aspect also plays a part in the artist's body-painting. Isolde Wawrin's symbolic forms are sensuous tokens of happiness, pleasure, and other states. She creates mysterious images in which attunement between man and nature within an unspoiled creation may be invoked but cannot be reproduced in words or dissolved. This pictorial language is limitless, and can be developed, expanded, and continued in all directions. An endless story with painting as a consummation that itself becomes a myth here – the myth of a personal pictorial language and non-verbal communication by way of sensuous signs open to empathy.

Rebecca Horn's body-objects, installations, videotapes, and films revive an old surrealist tradition, developing their own symbolism. Processes within the human unconscious are depicted by way of symbolically condensed images, objects, and mechanical systems. The myth of obsessions unfolds here visually.

The kingdom of dreams and fears was approached in the 1976 installation called "The Chinese Betrothed". This operates as follows. The doors of a small hexagonal black temple are wide open on all six sides. If the observer enters this inviting building, the trap snaps shut. The doors close mechanically and silently, and the observer is confined, but before the shock of isolation, of incarceration, establishes itself, there gets under way an erotically beguiling Chinese whispering, and the teasing and giggling of girls' voices. Suddenly and unexpectedly the trap opens again, and the observer is released. Had he or she been trapped in a dream, or assailed by wishes and fears from the unconscious? The 1975 "Paradise Widow" seems similarly ambivalent. Black feathers enclose a naked female body. When the mysterious column of feathers opens, the imprisoned body is partly revealed. The image, the allusion, can never be unambiguously interpreted as a specific physiological or psychological reflex. Rebecca Horn has put together entire films consisting of such multi-level reactive images. In "La Ferdinanda" (1981) various participants ritualise their obsessions against a background of symbolic objects rich in associations, but each of them ultimately remains self-preoccupied. Here Rebecca Horn deploys an encoded language so as to approach the theme of "Love". Another of her installations, presented at the 1984 "seen from here" exhibition, links psyche, body, and alchemy.

Hanne Darboven's serial works are representations of the passing of time. Time manifests itself in the process of copying something. The selection of a text and the movement of writing constitute the work of art. The structure of these serial compendia, which often summarise the course of several years, is elucidated in precise registers. Hanne Darboven started by writing down numerical sequences and texts with numbers. The sequence found inexorable visual expression as if part of a ritual. Numbers were thus relieved of their former function and systematology – as a means of registration or measurement of amounts. At issue was the purely process-like act of writing. These compendia of time were later increasingly filled with contents. Selected literary texts became more important. "Writing-Time" ("Schreibzeit"), the central work that represents the period from 1975–80, also mediates a getting to grips with historical and political events in encyclopaedic form. The serial sheets are mounted on red, like magazine covers, and now also incorporate symbolic photographic depictions alongside fragmentary encyclopaedia texts. The process-like re-experiencing of time has a magical quality. Conventional artistic genres, which can only symbolically condense the passing of time, are subordinated here to the realistic depiction of "Writing-Time". Hanne Darboven's declaration "I do not read, I write" points to the active nature of this registration of time. Time does not trickle away leaving no trace but finds pictorial expression in the artistic process without however being in any way stoppable. Hanne Darboven's serial works are thus also always Sisyphus-like in character.

"Ensembles" is the name *Anna Oppermann* gives to her collection and spatial ordering of materials. "Every ensemble" says the artist "circumscribes a theme, investigates a conflict, a problem, and is at the same time an aide-memoire towards ongoing reflection". Such ensembles are intended to make visible stages in the search for an identity of one's own. The starting-off point is always a small detail, usually a plant. Drawing this plant constitutes the first phase of meditation. Photographs, texts, and further drawings

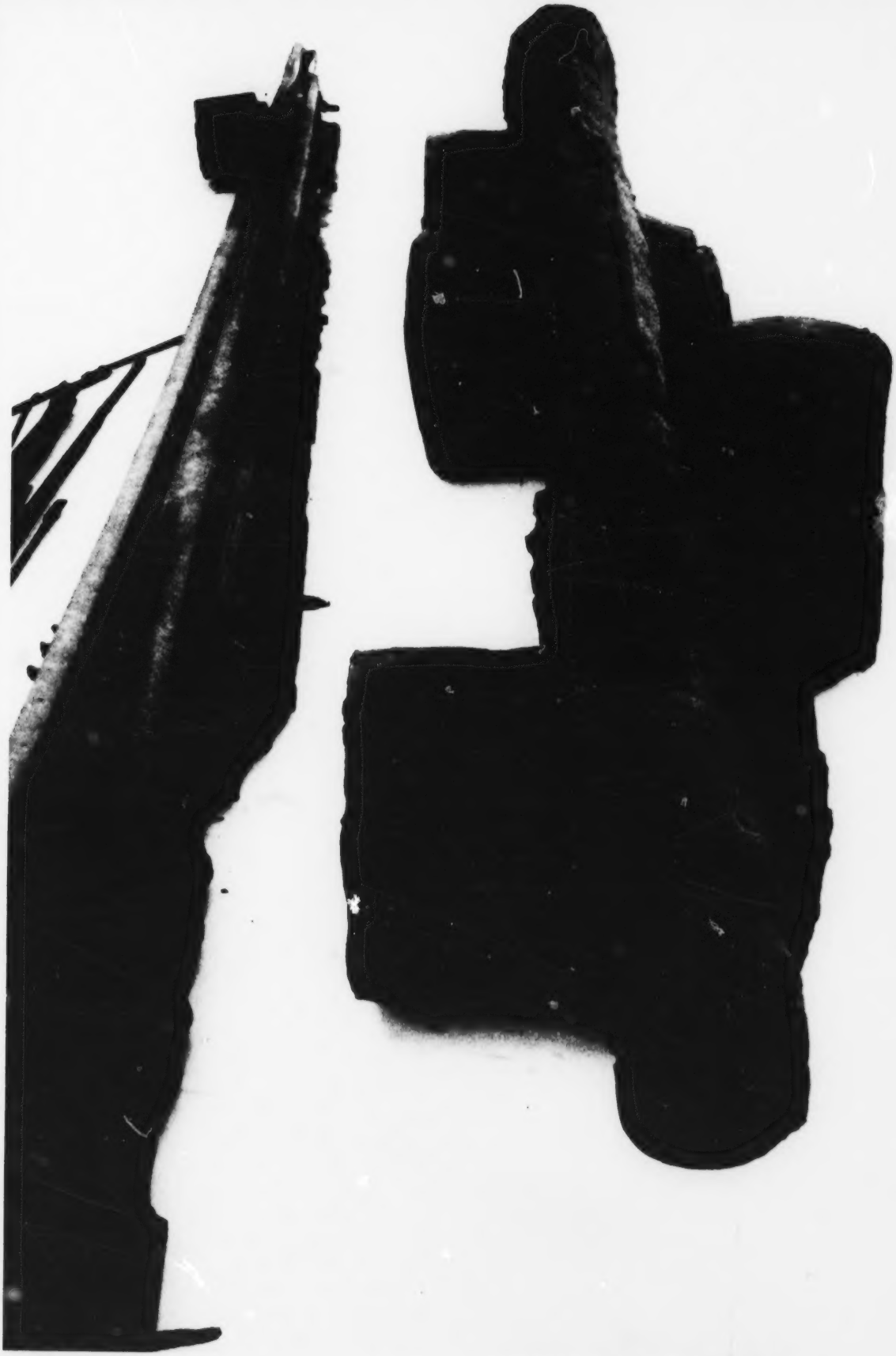
associatively expand the initial theme. Entire chains of images and thoughts arise. The range of problems and interests involved, from the relatively simple to the relatively complicated, from the private to the general, is extended ever further. The artist depicts her own stream of thoughts, thereby developing the ensemble into a self-portrait, making her own person into a myth. Anna Oppermann's "Object Altars", crammed with information and in form both vulnerable and open to transformation, symbolise the artist's fear of the impossibility or the futility of communication.

In her installations sculptor *Inge Mahn* upsets habitual ways of seeing and thinking. Her works do not confront the observer with the myths of distant peoples. The emphasis is rather on disclosing rituals and mechanisms within our own society. The artist singles out symbolic objects – often of a banal nature – which she changes by way of minimal interventions, and then later transforms ever more freely. As a sculptor she plays with pillars, monuments, altars, columns, and red carpets. She changes the nature of understanding through her uninhibited dealings with these worthy architectural forms. These defamiliarizing and playful interventions, which often deploy irony, make our reality comprehensible within a work of art. When she was still a student with Joseph Beuys, Inge Mahn built her own house – out of plaster – in the Academy corridor. The principle of self-encapsulation in the teaching business was thus spelt out. Documenta 5's "individual mythologies" included her school classroom in plaster as a frozen memory become monument.

Hannsjörg Voth's sculptural and architectural presentations of growth and decay are as-it-were re-stagings of some lost myth. Even in terms of their dimensions, they compete with real cult buildings from the past. The 1981 wooden pyramid, established on nine piles in the Ijsselmeer and itself supporting a stone boat, was 13 metres high. His most recent project, the stairway to heaven, a triangular clay building in Southern Morocco, is 16 metres high. Like the cult buildings of former times, Voth's architectural constructions are subject to decay, and ephemerality is even planned by the artist. The wooden pyramid in the Ijsselmeer was smashed by pack ice, and the desert staircase to heaven will, as Voth says, "gradually return – as a result of the workings of wind and water, heat and cold – to what it originally was: earth". That process was once characterised as a "transformation of nature into history, and from history back into nature". Such a deliberately staged historical process of growth and decay is, however, highly artificial, involving playing with possibilities and with the abundance of cult usages. The 1978 "Journey to the Sea" – a journey by raft of a 20 metre mummy-like figure along the Rhine to the sea where the sculpture was burnt in a funeral ceremony – revealed this kind of staging particularly clearly. Taken out of its meaning-giving historical and cultic context, the rite becomes a quotation on call whenever required, a post-modern and transformed "memento mori".

Seeing an accumulation of mythic images within the concrete structures of *Günther Uecker's* work may at first seem to counter accepted views but the artist's most recent development has provided confirmation. When Uecker was on a study trip in the United States in 1984, he learnt that the Black Mesa, the holy mountain for South Dakota Indians, was under threat because uranium had been discovered there. He therefore dedicated two sculptures to the Indians of this reservation. These totem-like installations are intended to draw attention to that assailing of the Indian self-image, giving visual expression to "the attack on the central spiritual reality of Indian culture". A threatening construction of four pine beams, with heavy machete blades menacingly directed towards the earth, is held together by crossed girders from which hangs a massive stone girdled with ropes. This ominous monument has been set up with the holy mountain as backdrop. The 1984 Black Mesa sculptures are not Günther Uecker's first response to the confrontation between Western thought, devoted to conquest and progress, and primordial cultures. As early as 1980 he created a monument for Indians in Guatemala with his nailed-up ship. "Chichicastenango" refers to the chief holy place for the Catholic mission in South America. Again the artist makes use of a clear, psycho-analytical symbolism of images. The boat, an image of salvation and hope, is nailed up here as a metaphor for the martyrdom that South American Indians suffered as a result of colonisation and missionisation. Even in his earlier nail-objects, Uecker was concerned with the theme of expulsion from homeland and the spiritual realm. Those included his 1968 table whose welcoming function was overturned by rows of nails projecting outwards beneath its top.

The far-reaching concepts pursued by the artists considered here demonstrate that works transcending traditional forms often set about representing complex subject-matter. What is at issue is representation of what has been experienced rather than just perceived, and consciousness-raising rather than moral uplift. Such art has a decidedly political dimension – to a greater extent than other forms of art. The return to painting in the art business around 1980 thus seems a retrogressive step.



Joseph Beuys, Tram Stop, *1983, Installation (Photo: Hildegard Weber)*

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Hannsjörg Voth,
Himmelstreppe
(Stairway to Heaven),
1984,

Drawing,
80 x 120 cm
(Photo: Ingrid Voth-Amslinger)

Lothar Baumgarten,
Floor Mosaic at the German
Pavilion at the Venice Biennale,

1984
(Photo: Stephan von Wiese)

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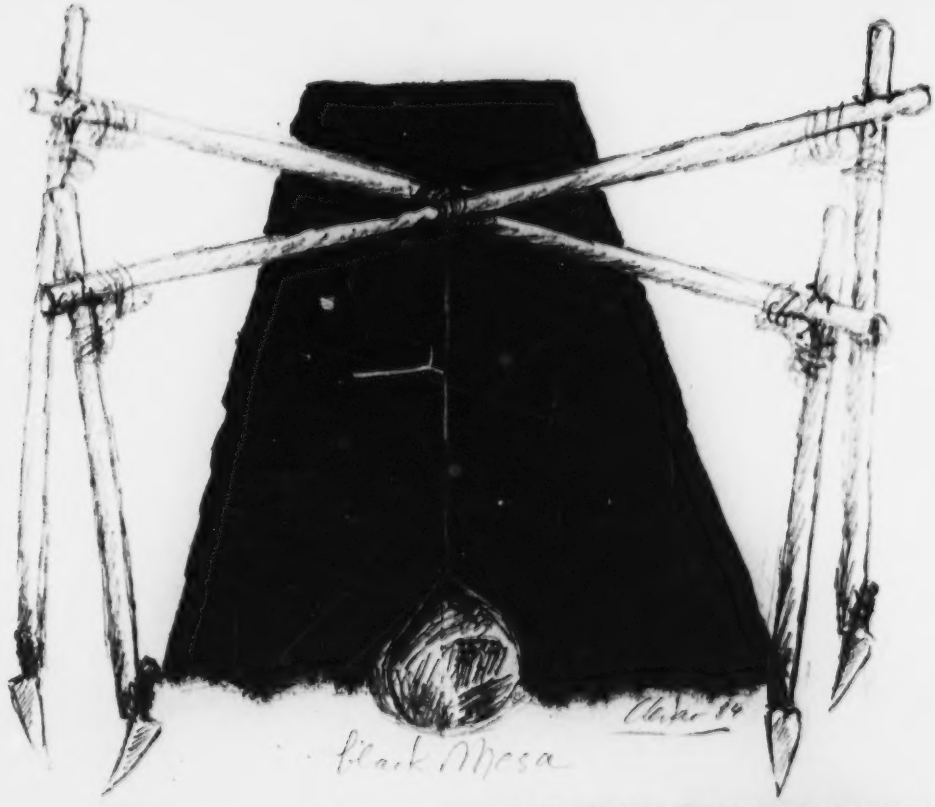
Hannsjörg Voth,
Himmelstreppe
(Stairway to Heaven),
Morocco Project 1986
(Photo: Ingrid Voth-Amslinger)



Günther Uecker,
Black Mesa,
Schwarzes Gold
der Indianer von
Utah
(Utah Indians'
Black Gold),
1984,
Project Drawing
(Photo:
Walter Klein)

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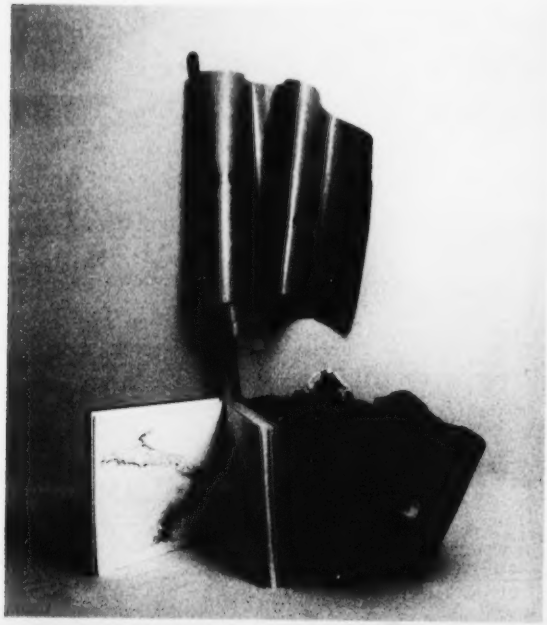
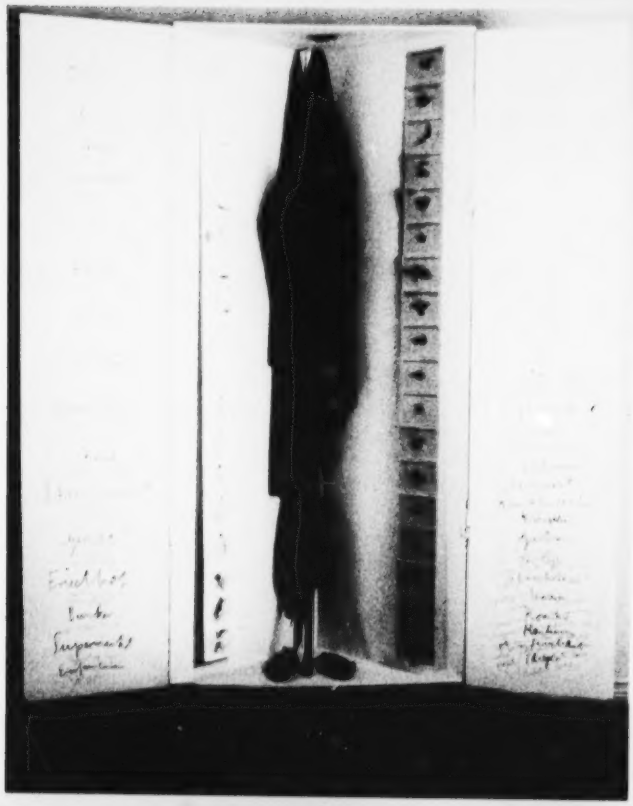
Lili Fischer,
Diplomatengepäck für den kleinen Grenzverkehr
(Diplomatic Baggage for Everyday Border Crossings),
1985
(Photo: Lili Fischer)



Lili Fischer,
Besenschrank
(Broom Cupboard),
1986
(Photo: Lili Fischer)



Lili Fischer,
Besentanz
(Broom Dance),
1986
(Photo: Katrin Schneider)

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Anna Oppermann,
Ensemble Cotoneaster horizontalis
(Anticommunication design),
1982–84
(Photo: Stephan von Wiese)

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Michael Buthe,
Hommage an die Sonne
(Homage to the Sun),
documenta 5, Kassel 1977
(Photo: Wilfried Bauer)

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Andreas Franzke

Sculpture and Installations

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Only limited attention was paid in the Sixties and Seventies to young German sculptors and object-makers. The response their work provoked was usually restricted to a small circle of initiated connoisseurs. Sculptors had even more difficulty than painters in making their presence felt amid the predominance of conceptual expressions of art, which largely swept the field in 1970, and amid lively discussion of enlargement of conventional concepts of art.

Almost an entire artistic generation oriented itself on the ideas and works of *Joseph Beuys* in the general spiritual atmosphere of fresh departures at the end of the Sixties. His works exerted a great influence on exhibitions in the same way as Beuys the artist shaped the public scenario. Hardly any younger artists remained uninfluenced by Beuys' thought-provoking activities whether they pursued what the latter propagated as possibilities of an expansion of what is involved in sculpture, or whether they felt themselves strengthened in their commitment to development of work in a different direction. Today it becomes retrospectively clear that even though the creative potential introduced by Beuys may have been passionately discussed, it hardly produced any appropriate further developments beyond such exemplariness and ultimately remained limited to individual beginnings. In terms of artistic achievement and spiritual stature, younger artists' identification with Beuys' person and work scarcely produced any outcome that could stand up to the models let alone excel them.

After his still relatively conventional beginnings, Beuys the sculptor very quickly and radically broke away, step by step, from tradition, and strove within a diversity of ventures for a reorientation of the principles governing sculpture, beyond established ideas about subject-matter, materials, and techniques. He thereby deliberately provoked dropping out from the framework of established genres. He replaced traditional sculptural processes and materials with his concept of a social sculpture derived from the artist's close connection with forms of Happening and Fluxus which he very much helped shape in Europe.

Towards the end of the Seventies, painting once again succeeded in attracting increased attention on the part of the general public, and shortly after that sculpture also experienced a noticeable upsurge. At present a trend towards intensified involvement in sculpture and objects is to be observed among younger artists with the outcome that three-dimensional works are becoming increasingly prominent at the bigger exhibition surveys of the art scene (even though paintings and drawings still predominate) and are exerting a more persistent influence than was the case a few years ago.

Conceptual Beginnings

The "rebirth" of sculpture and, above all, the reawakening public interest in three-dimensional forms of creation are partly the outcome – to an extent that should not be underestimated – of efforts by painters, who turned to sculpture in the Seventies and particularly after 1980. That is however only one side of the coin. The other shows that during the phase when – in Germany at least – sculpture was forced on the defensive by other media, professional sculptors did of course also intensively pursue their confrontation with new three-dimensional forms. It is above all their works that have now regained influence after a degree of clarification of the situation so that they are now viewed as models by younger artists. In addition an influence has long been exerted by such artists as *Ulrich Rückriem* and *Reiner Ruthenbeck*, who were both very close to Beuys, have been permanent features of exhibitions for years, and have also been recognised abroad as representatives of the new German sculpture and in many ways a bridge between generations.

Leaving aside the sculpture produced by painters, it was in the works of those two artists together with those of *Rebecca Horn* and *Klaus Rinke* (who is probably closer to Concept Art), representing very different views about sculpture and object art, that contemporary ideas about style, subject-matter, and intellectual models have received clearest expression, providing a particularly clear idea of the transition from the Sixties to the Eighties. The basic conceptual tendency, apparent in the break with traditional forms of

three-dimensional sculptural activity, constitutes a general characteristic.

All these artists start out from a reduced concept of materials and form. Strict economy of means is the supreme law for them. Rückriem has to a certain extent remained close to his sculptural metier (albeit redefined in terms of choice of materials and working methods) as is clearly apparent in his recent works in stone, whereas Ruthenbeck, Horn, and Rinke strive for objects and sometimes functioning apparatus which are mainly vehicles for action. Conventional sculptural practices are excluded in the case of Horn and Rinke – amid the beginnings of an aesthetic oriented towards industrial products. In their works one consequently encounters an extensive degree of anonymity, which Ruthenbeck charges with meditative tension. His objects ultimately allude to more or less known objects, and are a source of surprise for that very reason. Despite all the sparseness in their trenchant treatment of sculptural means, they suggest an almost magical and sacred atmosphere.

A comparable impact is exerted, on a very different level, by Rebecca Horn's functional objects. She stages rituals which seem to be impelled by magical powers and yet are coupled with mechanical precision-technology. The appearance of the already astonishing installation and its changing state at precisely calculated intervals intensify the mystery. Rebecca Horn's machines, which mediate actions and processes, very much involve the environment, and demand the psychologically excited participation of the observer, who involuntarily becomes the reflector of a mysterious course of events which may be sparked off by the apparatus but which fills the given situation with extreme excitement that one cannot escape.

Rinke's work is characterised by use of such elements as water in conjunction with the passing of time. The objects involved and their combination in larger ensembles do not constitute an end in itself but rather serve as a vehicle for the demonstration of processes. The apparatus deployed by Rinke is nevertheless highly appealing artistically – like Rebecca Horn's installations.

Rebecca Horn's objects, like those of Ruthenbeck and Rinke – have attracted attention ever since the late Sixties, characterised by a vehement sense of new departures with regard to the discovery and application of new media. When formal boundaries were effaced in confrontations with Fluxus, Happenings, Concept Art, Arte Povera, and other artistic movements, and largely annulled as binding norms, these artists formed, together with Rückriem, an avantgarde that has succeeded in consistently pursuing, extending, and intellectually enriching their chosen path right up to their most recent work.

Rückriem is particularly interesting in that context. Viewed superficially, he has maintained – in his work in stone at least – close links with sculpture. His real objective though is the thematisation of a process with regard to the specific preconditions offered by the material used – rather than the sculptural visualisation of an object. "The material, its form, its characteristics, and dimensions influence and put limits on my artistic activity" (Rückriem). That basic position still characterises the artist's work today, even though he has recently devoted greater attention to formal emphases and to some extent even investigated the concept of historic monuments.

Affinity with Architecture

The object – as a legacy of Cubism and, to an even greater extent, of Constructivism and Surrealism – has exerted a fascination on artists right up to the present day and is at present experiencing a kind of renaissance. The works of artists with such different approaches as Hien, Klingelhöller, Ecker, Luy, Mucha, and Metzel – and other interesting figures could also be mentioned – reveal a potential making discriminating use of the experience of the previous generation while at the same time undertaking experiments in defining a new artistic sense of the age clearly distinguishable from that of the Object Artists of the early Seventies.

The work of both *Albert Hien* and Olaf Metzel, contemporary and critical, fits into that context. Hien's objects take as their starting-point architectural monuments or utilitarian objects. Those serve as a trigger and are transposed into a new context of meaning. The artist quotes the known with succinct casualness, combining it with freely invented elements. The direct, formal staging of these objects accords with their appearance which is reminiscent of models for industrial products. That aspect is however strangely defamiliarised and obviously re-ordered in terms of an artistic way of seeing, so that it becomes clear to the observer that the world of architecture and technology is at most being paraphrased.

Olaf Metzel's visual language is clearly emblematic. He makes use of what is easily recognisable, providing it with a fresh frame of reference by combinations of subject-matter and a diversity of formal levels. Where the artist summons up still-life-like intensifications of his large-format works, he attains monumental symbolism. His "In die Produktion" ensemble (1984), cast from red reinforced concrete, has the quality of a larger-than-life Memento mori with reference to faith in industrial progress and immediate reality. Metzel clearly alludes to machinery used in production processes but avoids their usual appearance by way of a demonstratively disparate assembly. That effect is intensified by colossal enlargement of the individual parts and also by the element of material transposition whereby the metal world is converted

into the amorphous substance of concrete. Concentrated application of this means also enables Metzel to achieve an extremely effective force of expression in other works.

The works of *Elisabeth Wagner* embody a somewhat contrary position. Her installations, mostly constructed from painted cardboard, are not concerned with the state of our civilisation and the possibility of putting it to rights. They instead endeavour to playfully transform the pre-existing environment. Mythical creatures face cardboard objects, materially fragile and yet highly articulate in formal terms. Space is always a decisive element used by Elisabeth Wagner to create an atmosphere which can stimulate the observer into seeing the present day as being open, despite all its harshness, to imagination.

It is difficult to decide whether the frequency of architectural emphases in young artists' sculptures and objects is linked with current discussions of what is called post-modern architecture. At any rate the fact is that many sculptors and object-makers make great use of architectural allusions and forms. That does not nevertheless entail their taking individual and possibly recognisable buildings as a starting-point. They do, however, in general demonstrate a clear-cut affinity with the vocabulary of forms found in today's building and historical styles.

That tendency is not only to be found among younger artists – such as Hubert Kiecol, Reinhard Mucha, Nikolaus Gerhart, or Abraham David Christian – who are quasi-directly concerned with architecture. It also plays a part in the works of Harald Klingelhöller, Thomas Schütte, Olaf Methel, Wolfgang Luy, and to a certain extent in constructivist elements in Barbara and Gabriele Schmidt-Heins. Architectural principles of form are more or less clearly discernible in the works of all those artists. Even a sculptor like Rückriem has devoted especially intensive attention to architectural monuments recently, attempting in his Heine memorial to give expression to a new relationship between form and meaning going beyond the process-and-materials-oriented approach of his sculpture in stone and iron.

Harald Klingelhöller belongs in an intermediate sphere between works clearly based on buildings or their detailing and works founded on primary geometrical principles. Their formal element is strictly calculated, and structural clarity and comprehensibility play a considerable part in the impact they exert. Characteristically the artist also makes use of colour but subordinates it to the syntax of form.

Wolfgang Luy also shows a preference in his multi-constituent works for constructivist elements, borrowing architectural details for their development. An additional reflective and ironical effect is achieved by way of changing materials and incorporation of "foreign bodies". Luy has left behind his earlier "Space Barricades" but he is still very much interested in spatial relationships. Such a many-dimensional object as "The Broken Circle" serves as a model reflecting our civilisation with the artist impressively treating in its several parts contemporary divisions with regard to binding agreements on form and style.

Bogomir Ecker's objects react even more directly and, to some extent, aggressively to our environment dominated by the media and industrial mass production. Metal, plastic, prefabricated objects, light, and sound are the "materials" utilised in Ecker's installations, which "function" both within an exhibition and in the neutral surroundings of a road or street corner.

This functionalism, which in appearance is similar to the current mechanisms of communication, exerts an extremely disturbing influence. That is mainly achieved by objects, which seem somehow familiar to the observer, being defamiliarised to the point of absurdity through their unexpected presentation so that they remain persistently thought-provoking. Ecker is not concerned with symbols and artistic depiction of manifestations of our age. The strangeness of his works is instead oppressively reminiscent of objects which do not reveal whether they may possibly involve some positive and practical function or whether they entail a vision of an existence dominated by threatening instruments. The use of loudspeakers as means not usually to be found in association with art objects endow Ecker's installations with an immediacy challenging the observer in more than optical terms.

In the environment-like works of Hien, Klingelhöller, or Luy, architectural borrowings are only used like set-pieces or quotations within a broad range of formal and material values, whereas Mucha and Kiecol, or Gerhart and Christian, concentrate more directly on creations parallel to architecture. What has been built (in the broadest sense of the word) is the starting-point for their considerations and realisations. The range extends from Mucha's pieces presented as conceptual models mainly referring to their surroundings, by way of Kiecol's sculptures which at first sight look like miniature buildings, to Gerhart's columns.

Among the object-oriented artists born around 1950, *Reinhard Mucha* is certainly the most radical and conceptual. No matter whether he creates his objects from existing utilitarian objects such as furniture or whether he constructs these large pieces, they constitute a concentrated investigation of the spatial framework and the occasion for the presentation. The primary aesthetic definition of an installation or single piece presented in an exhibition room is of no great importance for the artist. Its hermetically conceptual orientation is more significant as a matter of principle. The actual is only a pretext for taking a demonstrative stand in a situation that seems to be determined by its function or by what lies behind its significance.

Hubert Kiecol's sculptures, which are usually small and cast in concrete, seem to exemplify architec-

ture reduced to its basic elements. The artist's preferred themes are the house, a flight of stairs, and the tower. He creates them with or without a base, and they can stand separately or equally well be combined in groups. Even though the appearance of these works is all too obviously shaped by references to architecture, their sculptural claims predominate. Although one would assume that the forms alone, intensified by the nature of the materials used, must identify these works as possible models for buildings, the artist literally achieves the exact opposite. One forgets that these are architectural forms, staircases, and towers since their compact sculptural character exerts a greater influence on the overall impression. Kiecol's sculpture refers us, in a completely unpretentious way, to our environment without any undertone of superficial criticism of civilisation or any concealed advocacy of primal and thus "better" living. Their artistic emanation is based on the unified presence of mass, emphasised by the reticent materials. These sculptures, small-scale though they may be, can certainly stimulate our sensitivity to sculptural formal values to a greater degree than many a lavish plagiarism of old or new architecture.

The withdrawal of emphasis from materials or constructional factors characteristic of Kiecol's works rather constitutes an exception though. Those elements are particularly stressed by such sculptors as Christian and Gerhart, clearly following on from Rückriem who devotes great attention to the stone and his working of it as the real source of artistic value.

Nikolaus Gerhart's works are particularly characteristic in that context. For him the work process is at the centre of artistic strategy. In a multi-constituent ensemble like "Bore-Hole X" (1983) a pillar has been extracted from each of several large blocks of limestone in such a way that the shell of these blocks remained intact. Now the effect aimed at is the confrontation of the pillar and the block from which it derived rather than, as might be expected, the pillar itself. Revelation of the process involved leads to establishment of an optically comprehensible relationship between the raw stone (in other words, nature) and a defined, quasi-historically determined form.

Abraham David Christian's preferred working material is plaster of Paris. He does not copy or reproduce buildings but the construction of his works awakens the impression of aspects of architecture. These works consist of clearly deployed formal constellations with the individual parts superimposed. A basic chord is usually sounded in a graduated plinth and finds continuation in individual vertical elements. Loads and supports, ornament and mass, and areas and volumes participate in interactions that are absolutely "classical" in their balance. Christian thereby effortlessly attains a monumental character reflecting but at the same time reformulating reminiscences of pillars, columns, obelisks, and other historical forms.

Barbara and *Gabriele Schmidt-Heins* attempt to establish references to inner spaces in the objects they create from cardboard. Colour plays an important part, and is used by both of them as a crucial element in what are very often sequence-like formal components. Constructivist tendencies continue to predominate, and have recently led Gabriele Schmidt-Heins to expanded works utilising various materials and moving towards model-like installations relating to the exhibition area.

Works utilising metal

Anthony Caro and Richard Serra have exerted a continuing influence on iron and steel sculpture in Germany. Erich Reusch, Eberhard Fiebig, Heinz-Günter Prager, James Reineking, Ansgar Nierhoff, Wolfgang Nestler, and Rückriem are among the best-known representatives of this form of sculpture, but artists who employ metal in a great variety of ways have also attracted attention recently.

Frank Dornseif should be mentioned in that connection. In his paraphrases of objects welded together from relatively thin metal rods or square steel bars used in building, he negates even the least impression of volumes. His objects are lines drawn in space, enclosing volumes, bringing detail into play, and leaving it to the observer to make a complete figure out of all this in his or her imagination. His paraphrases of past masterpieces are particularly interesting alongside figures, portraits, and recent still-lifes. The subject is limited to just a few lines, reduced to essential expressive elements and of brilliant formal clarity, whilst remaining absolutely recognisable. The crude iron used, which mainly comes from the building trade, brings about a witty relativising of the subject-matter.

Michael Witlatschil completely renounces any illustrative elements. His preference is for immaculately polished metal rods. No matter whether the artist uses them singly or in threes with the apex on a reflecting base, they always insistently mediate a sense of a model of order, based on extreme concentration. The motif of standing upright is derived from a prolonged process of adjustment to the verticals. Witlatschil's installations are imbued with an aura of weightlessness and a tension between light and heavy, vertical and horizontal. The process of erection, which the artist completes in a related action and usually records on video, is an integral part of the work itself, refering to its coming into being as well as to the visible state of affairs. In these video sequences the spectator experiences the concentration of the law of gravity onto a single point. This physical problem is not just presented in aesthetic terms. It is also expressed as a model of the workings of sculpture in that a maximum of conceptual evidence is presented through a minimum of formal extravagance.

Painters as Sculptors

The highly diverse panorama of contemporary sculpture and object art, presented up to now in terms of a number of characteristic examples, would be incomplete without consideration of the sculpture created by painters. A quick glance at exhibitions providing important overviews of contemporary art is enough to show how much attention is being devoted today to three-dimensional works by painters.

Painters' turning towards sculpture is nothing new, and has in fact been a widespread practice since the end of the 19th century. From Degas and Gauguin by way of Matisse, Picasso, the Brücke artists, up to the Surrealists, and then on to post-war artists, painters have time and again created outstanding examples of sculpture and objects, which also to some extent influenced the work of full-time sculptors.

German painters of the Fifties and Sixties also produced sculpture, and their number included Bernhard Schultze, Peter Brüning, and Horst Antes. Their works may have been represented in the exhibitions of the time but their impact remained relatively limited and scarcely entered public awareness as "painters' sculpture".

That situation has changed in recent years. Sculptural works by painters are determining public discussion to a much greater extent than used to be the case. One of the points of departure for the revival of sculptural activities was the much-discussed presentation in 1980 of *Georg Baselitz's* "Model for a Sculpture" in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Baselitz the painter set up a monumental wooden figure at the centre of his contribution to the Biennale. The fact that visitors' expectations were deliberately flouted meant that this wooden figure became a kind of signal – for artists as well as for the public. In the period that followed sculpture was perceived by painters in the light of a new topicality. With this "model", which was followed by more work in wood, Baselitz may have achieved a kind of breakthrough within the art scene, but his sculpture was by no means the first to be created by a painter of his generation. Penck devoted himself to object art as early as the start of the Seventies, and produced sculpture in wood at about the same time as Baselitz. Jörg Immendorff has also produced painted wooden figures since 1976.

It is hardly possible to demonstrate whether Baselitz's Biennale figure encouraged young German painters to leave behind the distinctions between artistic genres. What is certain though is that painters have produced an increasing number of sculptures since 1980, so that this trend by now threatens to get out of control as a kind of fashionable attitude.

The three-dimensional experiments by *Penck*, which he first showed at Cologne in 1972, are particularly interesting and still little known. These are objects – incorporating cardboard boxes, empty champagne bottles, and other banal articles – which, like the pictorial symbols in his painting, provide artistic visualisation of working hypotheses. Penck deliberately evades traditional criteria. Materials and form are subordinated, as secondary elements, to a superior expressive strategy.

Exactly the opposite is to be found in Penck's more recent works. These are formal symbols, hacked or cut out of tree-trunks with such simple tools as a band-saw or axe, in which figurative elements can be discerned without being more closely defined. The emphasis is on the wood and the crude treatment to which it is subjected. The observer can directly follow the process of creation, principally by way of the traces of unprofessional use of tools.

Such a revelation of the production process as a specific element is also to be seen in the works of Baselitz, to a lesser extent in Immendorff, and on a different level in Lüpertz's plaster sculptures which are basically models for creations cast in bronze. Penck and Baselitz only make limited use of colour in their creations in wood so as to stress individual elements whereas the sculptures of Immendorff and Lüpertz are totally conceived in terms of colour. That in itself entails that the process of making is only indirectly visible since it is partly covered over.

Even in his first "Model for a Sculpture" started at the end of 1979, *Baselitz* hacked and cut the figure in an elementary fashion out of a mighty block of wood, and his later larger than life-size forms out of a tree-trunk. He thereby renounces any smooth surface so as to preserve clarity of form. Where the spectator expects curves he leaves sharp edges. There are abrupt changes in curvature, exerting a decisive influence on the tension within the figure.

This approach, focusing on working wood, understandably assigns only a secondary role to formal aspects. Form results from the process involved and from the limits imposed by materials and tools. Penck and Baselitz very much take this element into account. Their vocabulary, which is rooted in the physical rather than the psychological, deliberately by-passes traditional aesthetic norms and appeals to a degree of automatism as the driving creative force.

Markus Lüpertz adopts an opposed position in his sculptural work. Even his first bronzes are based on a distinctive formal repertoire, which the artist may change in later works but in principle retains. His figurations with their emphasis on compact volumes are organised with great concentration, and the colour further intensifies that impression. It is clear that such form-conscious creativity had to seek out the challenge of the contrapposto as a leading motif in western sculpture. That is the theme of his monumental bronze "Standbein – Spielbein" ("Standing Leg – Free Leg"). Lüpertz reduces contrapposto to its essence

and makes playful use of it despite all of his statuary strength, so he both ingeniously questions tradition and elevates it into an appropriately contemporary cipher.

Comparable form-oriented precision is also characteristic of *Hans Baschang*'s works in plaster produced since 1981/82. As in his large drawings, he combines apparently organic forms with elements reminiscent of technical apparatus, attaining a sculptural concreteness suggestive of bodies without any direct depiction.

That is also true of *Antonius Höckelmann*'s early bronzes where there are clear allusions to bodily forms. In his more recent works, colour and the impact of such unusual materials as styropor or foil serve an important function, but these sculptures remain multi-dimensional in their associations and convince with a repertoire of forms possessing an original sculptural dimension.

The division between painter and sculptor is scarcely legitimate any longer in the case of Höckelmann, but the wooden sculpture that *Jörg Immendorff* has produced since 1976 is more clearly to be recognised as the work of a painter. Compared, say, with Lüpertz's coloured bronzes, this sculpture is more closely linked with the artist's painting by virtue of its painterly colours. That is also true of the levels of iconography whereby Immendorff mediates subject-matter which has developed in recent larger works from political partisanship to many-layered allegories.

The objects created by Werner Büttner and Albert Oehlen may not be directly comparable but their content establishes them on a similar level of critical questioning. A clearly mocking undertone is apparent in the way in which social rules and ways of behaviour are transformed through irreverently utilised commonplace objects into visual metaphors whose iconographic expression is both unusual and artistically explosive. The observer's expectation with regard to sculpture and objects is deliberately evaded and thus called into question.

That is particularly true of *Werner Büttner*'s sculptures which pose provocative questions. Style, materials, and ironic titles reflect with trivial immediacy themes in and backgrounds to today's discussions. The artist sometimes provokes an aggressive challenge through the blunt directness of his allusions.

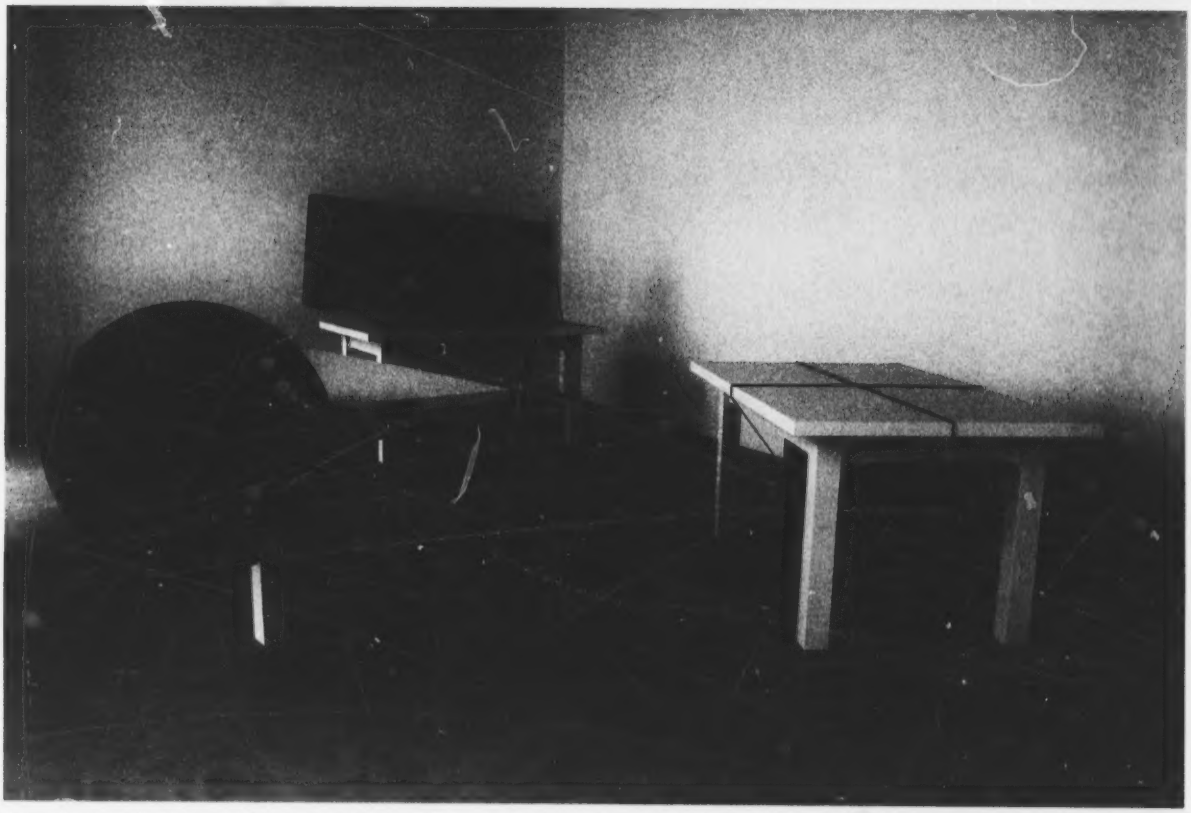
An untitled 1984 object by *Albert Oehlen,* constructed out of mighty old beams, is more dependent than most of Büttner's sculptures on the formal staging for its ironic emphasis. Despite the intentionally succinct treatment of the formal means there remains an unavoidable recollection of monumentality and the colossal. Oehlen qualifies that impression highly skilfully by his use of rough material marked by use and by stretching a spider's web made from metal strips between the beams. The monumentality that has been made absurd by the spider's web is called additionally into question in the fragmented framework of beams where the particularly stable orientation of verticals and horizontals is transposed into a kind of floating state.

Volker Tannert's 1982 sculpture, "Nude falling down a staircase", involves an ironic allusion to Marcel Duchamp's famous painting. A twisting staircase turning back on itself is the point of departure for a situation whose subject is movement: the apparent tumbling down of empty paint buckets. The sculpturally consolidated landing contrasts strikingly with the buckets stopped in simulated mid-fall. For Tannert, however, that is a way of fusing a firmly established block with precariously incorporated studio objects to create through this confrontation an arrangement whose triviality demands attention whilst deliberately appearing cliché-ridden and empty.

Transformation of given objects in a new and challengingly banal context also preoccupied *Jiri Georg Dokoupil* when in 1982 he defamiliarised and reinterpreted chairs by painting and adding to them. The surrealist principle of uniting essentially alien levels of object lives again in such solutions. Such an ironically reflective deployment of everyday things not infrequently derives among today's young artists from a delight in the unstylish, the banal, and gags. That is also to some extent true of Peter Bömmels' sculpture. He does not resort to what already exists in his mostly relatively small three-dimensional works. He uses papier-mâché to create individual figures or stage-like groups, which are either left in a kind of raw state or else painted extremely colourfully. They are strikingly like the protagonists in his paintings and often illustrate the same subject-matter. Pleasure in casual formulations unburdened by excessively high technical demands receives characteristic expression here, and seems to particularly attract today's young artists. Some young sculptors thus employ deliberately unprofessional ways of seeing and working so as to avoid the least sign of technical perfection or stylistic allegiance.

Such fears of contact with tradition are confronted by innumerable examples of pleasurable playing with its possibilities. Those seem, particularly among very young artists, to be the two poles in whose field of tension attempts at creating three-dimensional form take shape. On the one side there is an elemental pleasure in sculptural forms linked with an emphatic lack of respect for the conditions prevailing in this medium, whilst, on the other, works that utilise past styles like quarries usually deploy quotations with a trenchant directness extending to downright travesties of artistic methods, means, contents, and formal relationships.

Reiner Ruthenbeck, Tisch auf Stahlstäben (Table on Steel Rods), *1984 (Photo: Dirk Reinartz)*



Reiner Ruthenbeck, Tische mit blauer Kugel (Tables with Blue Ball), 1982 (Photo: Dirk Reinartz)

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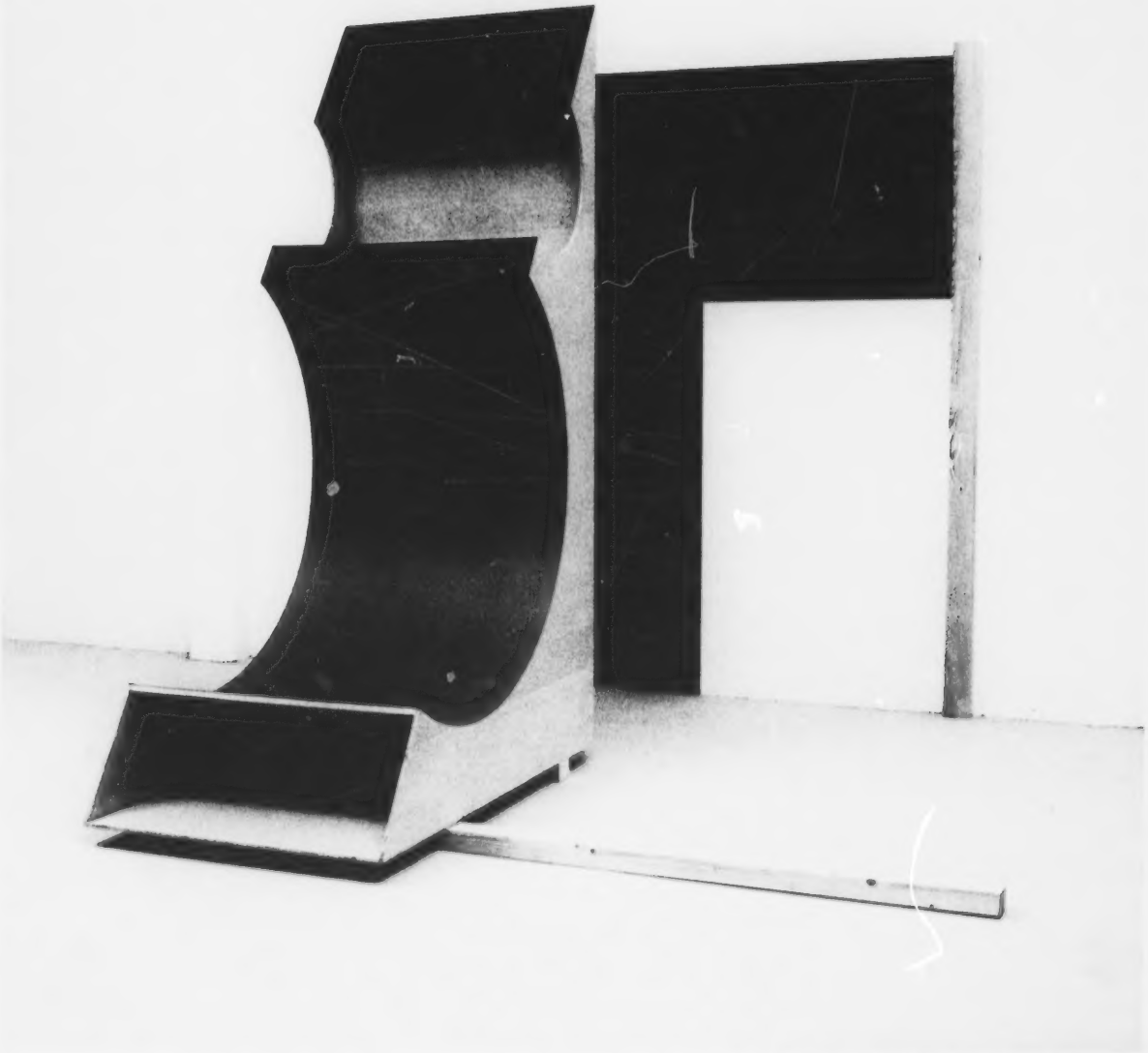
Gabriele Schmidt-Heins, Instrument No. 1, 1984 (Photo: Gabriele Schmidt-Heins)

Gabriele Schmidt-Heins, Eldena, 1985 (Photo: Gabriele Schmidt-Heins)

Gabriele Schmidt-Heins, Sculpture, 1986 (Photo: Gabriele Schmidt-Heins)



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Frank Dornseif, Stilleben mit Totenkopf (Still-Life with Death-Head), 1985, Reinforced iron, 178 x 244 x 100 cm (Photo: Galerie Jöllenbeck, Cologne)

Ulrich Rückriem, Nordhorn, 1982, Split and cut sandstone, 250 x 50 x 160 cm (Photo: Robert Häusser)

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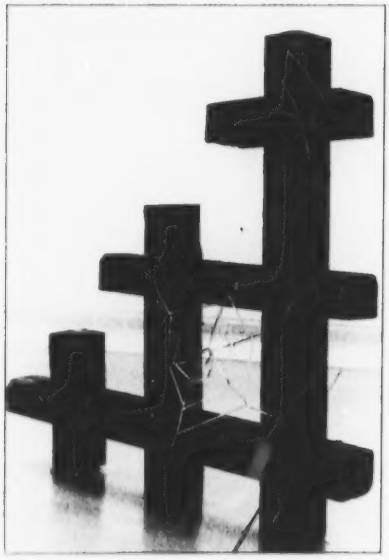
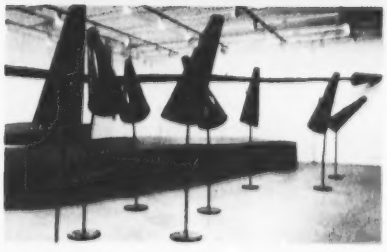


Albert Oehlen,
Untitled,
1984,
Wood,
200 x 230 x 21 cm
(Photo:
Galerie Hetzler,
Cologne)

Antonius Höckelmann,
Zungel,
1984,
Aluminium foil,
coloured chalks,
gauze, glue,
82 x 20 x 40 cm
(Photo:
Galerie Werner, Cologne)

Rebecca Horn,
Installation
Körper-Raum-Reflexe
(Body-Space-
Reflex Installation),
1984,
Mercury bath,
pendulum, 2 hammers
(Photo: Dirk Reinartz)



Bogomir Ecker,
Die Laufbahn,
1983,
Installation in the
von der Heydt-
Museum,
Wuppertal
(Photo: Bogomir
Ecker)

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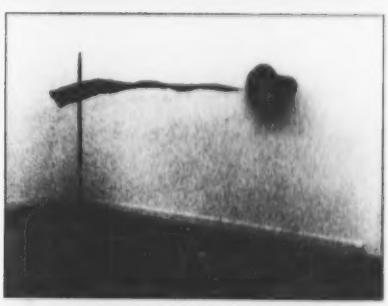
Olaf Metzel,
In die Produktion
(Into Production),
1984
(Photo:
Dirk Reinartz)

Wolfgang Luy,
Der gebrochene Kreis
(The Broken Circle),
1983,
Installation in the
Kaiser-Wilhelm-Museum,
Krefeld
(Photo: Volker Döhne)



Bogomir Ecker,
Lautsprecher
(Loudspeaker),
1984,
Iron and PVC,
200 x 150 x 40 cm,
Installation
in the Produzen-
tengalerie,
Hamburg
(Photo:
Bogomir Ecker)

Harald Klingelhöller,
Ende des Tunnels
(End of the Tunnel),
1984,
Installation,
Galerie Fischer,
Düsseldorf
(Photo: Dorothee Fischer)

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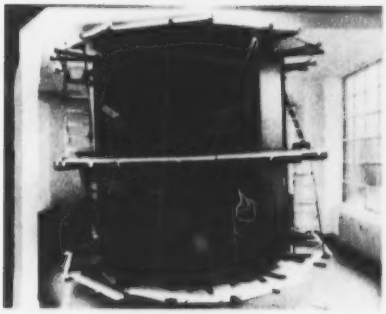

Reinhard Mucha,
Das Figur-Grund
in der Architektur des Barock/
Für Dich allein
bleibt nur das Grab
(The Figure-Ground
in Baroque Architecture/
For You Alone
Remains Only the Grave),
1985
(Photo:
Galerie Hetzler, Cologne)

Michael Witlatschil,
Stand 21 – Ich 5,
1983,
Steel, glass,
230 cm high
(Photo: Galerie Jöllenbeck,
Cologne)

Felix Droese,
Ich habe Anne
Frank
umgebracht
(I Killed Anne
Frank),
1981
(Photo:
Andreas Franzke)

Abraham David Christian,
Der heilige Mensch VII
(The Holy Man VII),
1982/86,
Bronze,
189 x 39 x 44 cm
(Photo: Thomas Struth)

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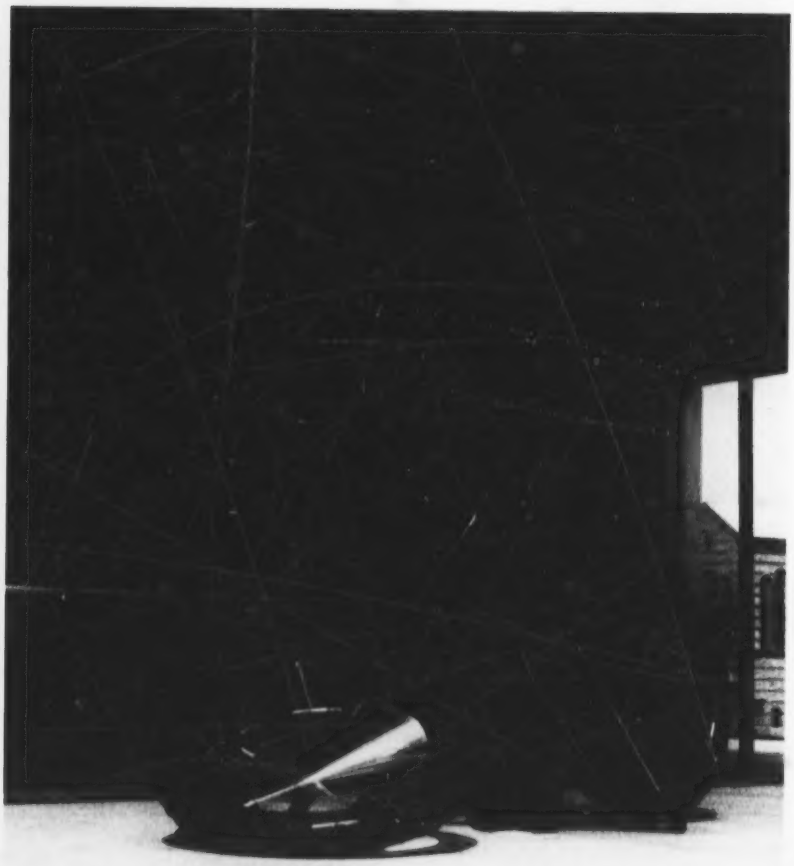
Eberhard Fiebig,
Tanagra 2,
1979,
Corten steel,
500 x 70 cm
(Photo:
Andreas Franzke)

Hubert Kiecol,
Treppenecke
(Corner with
Staircase),
1984,
Concrete,
39 cm high
(Photo:
Schürmann)



Albert Hien,
Fahrrad
(Bicycle),
1985
(Photo: Andreas Franzke)

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Jörg Immendorff,
Adler (Eagle),
1981,
Painted lime wood,
206 x 37 x 43 cm
(Photo: Galerie Werner, Cologne)

Markus Lüpertz,
Standbein-Spielbein
(Standing Leg, Free Leg),
1982,
Painted bronze,
320 x 100 x 100 cm
(Photo:
Galerie Werner,
Cologne)

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Georg Baselitz,
Untitled,
1982/83,
Wood, c. 260 cm high,
(Photo: Galerie Werner, Cologne)

A. R. Penck,
Der Geist von L (L's Ghost),
1980,
Painted wood,
82 x 28 x 24 cm
(Photo: Galerie Werner, Cologne)

Nikolaus Gerhart, Bohrung X (X Boring), 1983, *Installation, 4 pairs with shell and core, Shell c. 175 x 35 x 35 cm, Core c. 190 x 35 x 35 cm* *(Photo: Philipp Schönborn)*

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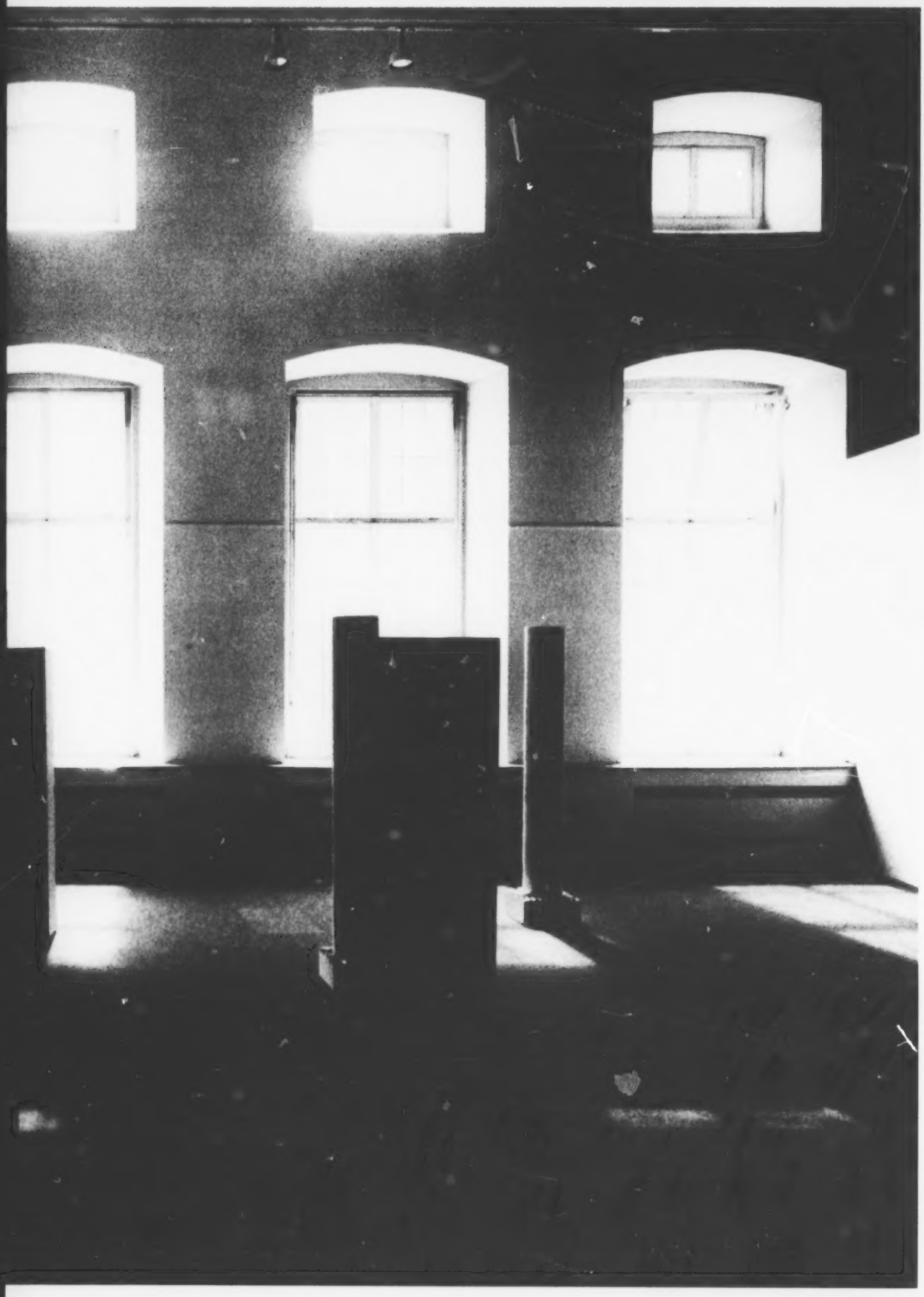

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Klaus Honnef

Photography as an Artistic Medium

70

Years ago their photographs only provoked a shaking of heads among German photographers. "Sterile, unimaginative, and boring" were the most friendly judgements passed on the work of these two photographers. The guild of those involved in photography either professionally or for sheer love of it also for the most part deliberately ignored them. That was all the easier because these works were generally shown where photographers were only to be found for two kinds of reason: either because they had a special job to do, or else for the highly private reason that they wanted to record remarkable people's noteworthy reactions to remarkable things.

For their part museums and art associations, in fact the world of art in general, were not particularly favourably inclined either towards the work produced by photographers at that time. Photography was viewed as a necessary aid for the provision of information about works of art in catalogues or magazines – as no more than a vehicle of propaganda. There was one exception though. If an avantgarde artist made use of a camera, the art world was generous – no matter even if the outcome of his efforts did not even fulfil the most primitive technical demands of professionals or of amateur photography. In fact the less that was the case, the more artistic the photographs were thought to be.

Even though their photographs did demonstrate high technical standards, the two photographers had the art world to thank for the opportunity to present their works to the public. Their photographic images henceforth sailed under the flag of "Conceptual Art", and attracted increasing attention since this form of art aroused a greater response among critics and dealers than among the public interested in such matters.

In the meantime *Hilla* and *Bernd Becher* are famous beyond the world of art, and are among the most important practitioners of contemporary German art. It is the specific object of their photographic work that has made them known beyond the boundaries of a confined sphere of art. Hilla and Bernd Becher are historians of the industrial age, historians with a camera.

Even before this epoch of human history enjoyed general public interest, they conserved its "monuments" in their photographic documentation. The way, say, the Ruhr looked some twenty years ago is only adequately preserved in the necessary diversity and density in the Bechers' photographs. They never limited themselves to simple registration, and nor have they bathed the industrial landscape in a false romantic light as is usual in industrial photography.

Hilla and Bernd Becher have developed a special photographic style appropriate for the objects they depict: a sober, factual style concerned with analytical representation; absolutely meticulously accurate about details whilst monumental in visual conception and didactic in presentation. Characteristically, Hilla and Bernd Becher approach their theme in series of pictures rather than in individual shots. The serial principle always fulfils a specific function and is not an end in itself. The photographers thereby 'uncover' their visual objects in front of their audience so as to communicate insight into the basic features of construction involved. On the other hand, the rigorous style and artistic discipline entailed in the Becher's photographs elevate them far above average photographic work. It was not just chance that their pictures' quality initially became apparent against the background of an art which was particularly prevalent in the Seventies.

The Bechers' influence on photography in the Federal Republic of Germany was limited to start with. That is surprising since in terms of style they were a continuation of a tradition that developed in the first half of the century and gained a reputation for itself in connection with August Sander, the great German photographer. Sander produced a kind of atlas of German society with his factual and sober images. His entire œuvre was only published in a more or less complete form after the Second World War. Sander's experience was also similar to the Bechers'. His work was more highly valued in the art world than among photographers. According to the late Werner Manz, a contemporary and fellow-photographer, August Sander was not even among the most celebrated representatives of his profession in Cologne where he long had a studio.

For some years now, Hilla and Bernd Becher have, however, experienced mounting interest even on the photographic scene. In widely distributed photographic magazines where commerce takes precedence over art, sympathetic authors have started to devote interest to their work – but apologetically rather than in terms of critical and analytical assessments. The highpoint to date in this basically surprising development was the German Photographic Society's decision to award its prestigious 1985 Cultural Prize to Hilla and Bernd Becher.

The Bechers' career and their special circumstances throw revealing light on the situation of photography in the Federal Republic of Germany during the second half of our century. Relations between the art scene and the world of photography have nevertheless become closer than in earlier times. It is not just individual museums and art associations that have accepted photography, or individual art scholars who view photography as a legitimate element within their scholarly research. There already exists a small group of such supporters, which is slowly but continually expanding. Although budding art historians still have difficulties in making their way with a theme from photography, and in general scholarly treatment of issues in photography leaves much to be desired both quantitatively and qualitatively, the remaining resistance on the part of scholarship and the art business – displaying rare unanimity for once – is flagging. This resistance is certainly not a German speciality. It has its roots in history and has constantly accompanied photography from the beginning. The preconditions for serious consideration of photography as a relatively new and yet completely legitimate means of artistic expression are nevertheless considerably more favourable in the Federal Republic of Germany than in neighbouring countries. Big thematic exhibitions or monograph-like retrospectives in museums and art associations are nothing unusual here, and a number of museums have their own photographic departments and collections which they systematically extend, sometimes in extremely difficult circumstances. The precariousness of their situation is, however, demonstrated by the fact that the weal and woe of photography within the realm of art continue to depend – as is also true of museums, schools, and universities – on the initiative, energy, and capacity for getting their way of individual personalities.

Photography in this context does not involve – just to avoid any misunderstandings right from the start – the usual utilitarian photography, the work done by amateurs or ambitious hobbyists, or even what is known as artistic photography. What is at issue here are creative endeavours exclusively or primarily utilising photographic means, which have made, or are making, an essential contribution to the history of the visual arts. It is of secondary importance whether such achievements are the work of professional photographers or of artists who have mastered the camera. Artists followed the pioneers in determining photography's initial steps, albeit artists who would scarcely have entered the annals of art history in their learnt profession of portraitist or miniaturist. On the other hand, important artists have time and again reacted to photography in a great diversity of ways. A considerable number took photographs themselves, enriching the history of photography with important pictures. Only in the Twenties though did many prominent artists openly and purposefully propagate and employ the camera as an instrument of their intentions. Some saw the camera as a weapon whose pictures they wanted to use in the struggle for emancipation of the masses, whilst others were mainly fascinated by the possibilities offered by laboratory technology. They were all part of the artistic avantgarde so that their field of action remained limited. Only in the Seventies were artists to return to photography – but on a much larger scale this time. The moment at which that happened is of interest. Professional photography seemed to be undergoing a phase of stagnation when its creative potential was exhausted. Otto Steinert's ambitious attempt at developing the concept of "Subjective Photography" in the Federal Republic at the start of the Fifties resulted in few convincing pictures. Two other factors also constituted a great threat to the photographic profession. Photographic technique had become so simple that any layman could satisfy his photographic requirements with his own camera, and television had almost completely taken over the photographic sphere of topical reporting which was a grave development since journalistic photography, disseminated through millions of copies of illustrated magazines, had after all been one of the most important and momentous innovations in the history of photography. This loss of a so-to-speak traditional sphere of photography did not merely entail material consequences for photographers. Of even greater significance was the fact that photography lost access to two spheres to which it owed its most important impulses to date so that the palette of its possibilities was reduced. It would be useful to know whether that was the reason for a decline in the number of professional photographers. If that were the case, it could be maintained that the diminished number of professional photographers reduced the pressure of competition with the result that an important impulse towards qualitative creative standards became weaker.

"Head Art" was the solution going the rounds of the art business at that time. That concealed an appeal by contemporary artists calling on their public to complete in their imaginations the deliberately sparse information they were given. The objective of artistic endeavours was not completion of an artistic process, such as a picture or a sculpture, but rather the recording of an idea, of a "moment", that provided the incentive for artistic production. The material aspect of this Idea Art or Conceptual Art frequently merely consisted of brief written statements, casual sketches, and usually amateurish photographs (probably so as to intensify the recipients' power of imagination). The avantgarde principle culminated in Conceptual Art. Its most stringent exemplification was manifested in pure works of art in the truest sense of the word. And yet the works that drove forward artistic development were drawings and photographs that did not want to renounce visual orchestration. No mat-

ter what status Conceptual Art may have within art history, it indisputably drew artists' attention to photography.

The outcome was twofold. Contemporary photography experienced a noticeable boost to creative impulses, and at the same time the history of photography attracted the attention of the art world. Even photographers who do not view themselves as being part of the avantgarde were suddenly the subject of extensive exhibitions in museums and art associations. Many of their works had already been shown in photokina presentations without the art business having paid much attention. The responsibility for that partly lies in the aesthetic conservatism of the photographic scene. Instead of responding adequately to artists' aesthetic challenges, people went onto the defensive and closed their minds to the idea that both the forms involved in the photographic view of the world and the objects and motifs of photography are subject to constant change. The most important periodic exhibition of advanced contemporary art, the documenta at Kassel, went the other way when in 1977 it incorporated photography in art's territory at the much-disputed media show. The presentation demonstrated both historical and topical aspects of photography, and also attempted – albeit rather inadequately – to show how art, photography, film, and video reflect one another.

Eight years later the situation facing serious photographers in the Federal Republic of Germany has not got any better. Even though photography has established a footing in the art world, it has still not attracted sufficiently many collectors on whom ambitious photographers can rely. The "unanticipated" rebirth of painting in the Eighties also thwarted art dealers' initial successes in selling photographic images. Even though, half a decade later, a degree of relaxation is becoming apparent, most of the men and women who represent photography in the Federal Republic today eke out a comparatively miserable existence. Some work as university teachers whilst others – a handful – have won an established place in the art business or struggle along through life and changing fortunes as freelance photo-journalists. Their photographic work provides a satisfactory livelihood for very few of them – and most of those are older men such as Hilmar Pabel, Stefan Moses, Robert Lebeck, and F. C. Gundlach, who made a name for themselves as photo-reporters or fashion photographers even before the demise of illustrated magazines.

The photographic scene in the Federal Republic of Germany thus seems correspondingly diffuse and amorphous. It is not any kind of monolithic block, and sometimes seems pluralistic to the point of lacking identity. There does not exist any specifically German photography in the Federal Republic. With regard to traditional photography one observes a rapid decline in technical skills and increasing resignation on the part of photographers who see no chance of holding their own against the omnipotence of designers in a situation where journals with photographic ambitions are rare. Anyone who does not succeed in implementing his or her visual ideas in books will not attract the attention of the critical public. And books are certainly not a universal remedy either.

"Men" ("Männer") is the terse title of a book that was much discussed in the world of art and photography, and also turned out to be a commercial hit. This is the fourth book brought out by its author, *Herlinde Koelbl*, a photo-journalist who was not specially trained for this profession. Her presentation of "The German Living Room" ("Das deutsche Wohnzimmer") attracted almost as much attention. Both books were accompanied by exhibitions, a combination that has frequently been employed recently as a form of mutual assistance. Herlinde Koelbl is not an innovator in formal terms even though she has opened up fresh areas or spheres that previously had only been half-heartedly and inadequately worked. She views work on specific projects chosen by herself as a complement to her professional activities, as a necessary corrective to employment that demands constant switches of attitude as well as intellectual and psychological changes of course. To that extent she applies the categories of artistic work to photography. Commissioned photography is mainly what Riesman calls an "other-directed" activity whereas artistic work principally – in theory at any rate – obeys inner drives. Reminiscences of Conceptual Art and elements of classic photo-reportage fuse in the "German Living Room" book to create an enlightening dialogue between pictures and text whereas in "Men" the photographic subject with all its sexual implications and the dissecting "uninvolved" gaze of the camera heighten one another to the point of a strange, ambivalent, and multi-contrasted intensity. In her photographic projects Herlinde Koelbl presses forward into intermediate areas which neither the mass media nor advanced art explore, demonstrating that the possibilities open to conventional photography are by no means exhausted yet.

Nevertheless, without intensified awareness of photography's changed status we are scarcely capable of imagining serious utilisation of photography. Originally viewed as a depiction of reality whose exactness and faithfulness to the original could not be exceeded by the object itself, photography has long become a reality sui generis, which more or less profoundly shapes any imagined image of reality. Photography regulates the code for perceiving reality. Auditory and haptic cues – not to mention smell and taste – by now only play a subordinate part whose range is also declining. Right from the start, avantgarde art set out to upset ingrained patterns of imagination and sensation, and in ideal circumstances to break them down. Advanced photography in the Seventies

devoted particular attention to what was known as media criticism, endeavouring with varying success to undermine the "truth" and apparently evidential nature of photography. Ever since we have become increasingly aware of the extent to which the photographic view of the world has manipulated how we imagine the world, it has been thought necessary to dispute the seriousness of any naive use of the camera. Conscious application of advanced artistic and aesthetic principles in photography presupposes critical insight and endows photographic practice with the necessary aesthetic substance.

The specific technical structure of the medium of photography, the apparent automatism of the coming into being of a picture, the supposed authenticity of the copy of a picture, the striking rationality of the structure of a picture – those factors brought into being an artificial world, more easily comprehensible and less contradictory than what currently exists, before our very eyes. Every additional aesthetic act increases the artificiality of this world and enlarges the gulf separating it from experienceable reality. The further we are attracted onto the thin ice of this artificial world, the more intense our awareness of its artificial character becomes. On the other hand, we recognise in the artificial creations of photography aspects of experienced reality, heightened and partially distorted (but in the Brechtian sense on behalf of clarity). The melancholy atmosphere of *Candida Höfer*'s "Inner Spaces" ("Innenräume") reflects the lostness of modern mass man and conversely his secret longing for protection and security. Clearly structured photographic images in subtle and frequently cold colours present places where people have fleeting, chance meetings: waiting-rooms, hotel foyers, or museums – localities unsuited to either shared experience or an intimate Tête-à-Tête. Candida Höfer learnt her photographic skills from Karl Hugo Schmölz, and as a trained photographer she became a pupil of Bernd Becher, studying at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art alongside Axel Hütte and Thomas Struth. The stylistic rigour found in Hilla and Bernd Becher also characterises their pupils' photographic work, but it would be wrong to think that the Bechers imposed their artistic concept. It is more the case that Höfer, Hütte, Struth, and others felt attracted by the Bechers' captivating precision, clarity, diversity, and modernity. In recent years *Axel Hütte* has turned to the complex theme of portrait photography, depicting people like objects, analysing and dissecting but without literally treating them as things. On the contrary in fact. His as-it-were "scientific" attitude towards his models creates distance and a kind of protective filter which we indiscrete and voyeuristic observers cannot penetrate. American photographers like Neil Winocur and Annie Leibovitz make use of a similar photographic method.

It was not just by chance that *Gabriele* and *Helmut Nothhelfer* entitled their first representative publication "Intermediate Spaces" ("Zwischenräume"). They too are settled – as far as their aesthetic point of view is concerned – in a "somewhere" between art and (applied) photography. The term "Intermediate Spaces" applies more to the description of their photographic and artistic objective rather than laying down their aesthetic approach. They want to reduce the distance between the people they photograph and also the gap between photographer and subject, thereby establishing a kind of sympathetic relationship. In addition they strive to make visible, or better still perceptible, what is not apparent to the "distracted" glance (Walter Benjamin), not stopping time but rather reflecting a shared human feeling, ephemeral in nature but weighty in its consequences, by way of a paradigmatic figure.

W. H. Auden, the English poet, once said that: "The camera records visible facts, which means all may be fictions". The irrevocable paradox of photography has become a central subject for advanced photography with regard to the ever-increasing flood of photographic images inclusive (for the moment) of television's electronic images. Photography entails the paradoxical characteristic of relativising what is significant and equipping the unimportant with a disproportionately high signification. Sensational photos quickly lose their affective qualities whereas inconspicuous pictures often absorb many traces of experience and feeling over the course of time. Artists have capitalized both ways on such characteristics, either by blowing up the large to the banality of excessive dimensions or by reducing the secondary to the point of redundance. *Jürgen Klauke*'s early photo-sequences were spectacular and strident in emphasis, opening our eyes to monstrous aspects of everyday reality. His "staged photography" exaggerated familiar even if usually repressed phenomena, and opened up access – by way of the element of deliberate staging, similar to fashion photography – to a world of images and imaginings, of secret wishes and suppressed yearnings. Klauke's photographic "facts" are invented – made up in the same way as a poet condenses his subjective experiences into aesthetic forms so as to arouse our dulled sensibility and awaken our slumbering consciousness. Klauke is not a photographer but an artist who prefers working with the means available to photography. Drawings prepare the ground for his photographic sequences mixing elements from widely differing spheres of art and everyday culture taking in the film, theatre, Performance Art, literature, fashion photography, and advertising. Inner becomes outer. The seductions and manifest feelings of anxiety within his staged images touch us, unsettling the attitude of dissociated observers. When a protagonist in the photographic depiction suddenly turns his camera on us, the relationship between picture and observer is unexpectedly – but only purportedly – reversed, and we are all at once functioning as actors.

Bernhard Johannes Blume presents a "Quasi philosophical-ideoplatical slide show" in his publication "natürlich" ("naturally"). The presentation consists of a sequence of 60 instant photographs, and is thus only "quasi" a talk with slides. The artist introduces the photo-sequence by way of a cleverly crazy essay in which sense and nonsense are inextricably mixed. More than any other artist Blume has most persistently and intelligently attacked photography's claim to truth. Anyone who sees him as a furious critic of the media is mistaken though. Blume fences with a foil, with wit and esprit. His actions are subversive, undermining the suggestive power of the pictures that overwhelm us by means of images which reveal a completely different truth to conventional photographs, so-to-speak standing the latter on their head. Conventional photography tends to reify the depicted world whereas Blume's works endow it with a surprising life of its own. Things take on different shapes, start to hover, and positively develop their own will. In Blume's photographs human beings are frequently the "victims" and things the protagonists. In his pictures photographic reality appears as literally unchained reality, a state of affairs where the familiar laws of nature do not apply. Blume is also an artist who defamilarises the experienceable world to the point of identifiability. One of his best-known picture series – a sequence of large-format black-and-white photographs with a quasi-narrative flow – provides us with a view of the pandemonium of bourgeois self-comprehension, but we voyeuristic observers are confronted there with resoundingly infernal laughter. Blume's exceptionally complex work does not reveal itself easily, and thus has difficulties on the art market. His emblematic drawings have, however, much influenced a number of artists from the Cologne school of new painting.

With the art and photo scenes presenting such a confusing appearance, no-one should be surprised that many of these artists first experimented with photography before turning to painting. That in no way entails that they have finished with photography as a means of visual expression. In his first one-man show in a museum, *Walter Dahn* brought together nothing but "photographic works" (as the show was also entitled). One of his motives was to disperse superficial classifications of his artistic works in favour of more adequate observation. We can only fittingly assess his creations against the background of our age, not least in the context of the flood of images submerging us daily. Walter Dahn has always faced up to that challenge, and that is why his pictures are always pictures against this indiscriminate mish-mash of images – counter-images in the truest sense of the word. At first sight his pictures are disturbing because of their supposedly defective nature. The photographs are covered with spots, the subject-matter out of focus, and the formats frequently irregular and disproportionately large. Everything points to the fact of fabrication. The pictures reveal themselves as being works that are autonomous in character, deriving the material for their world to a certain extent from themselves. They at no time arouse any impression of wanting to reproduce nature faithfully. Many works are therefore not concerned with depicting experienceable, visible reality but take as their object the reality of art: the art of Walter Dahn and other known or anonymous artists which he makes use of for his creations. Some of his photographs are based on drawings, mostly tiny and produced at different times for different reasons, which he then reproduces. When printed in colour in an art magazine such photographic works lose their identity and seem like drawings if there is no explanation. Walter Dahn's art involves constant investigation of the possibilities open to creative mediation of objects and events in the age of technical reproducibility of images. It is there that his works, the photographs as well as the paintings and drawings, refer to reality. His pictures are images that always supply their own theory as part of their sensory presentation – not naive pictures but images with built-in critical reflection.

Walter Dahn's attitude towards photography is nothing unusual among advanced contemporary artists. Perhaps one of the many paradoxes of the photographic medium involves the fact that the more it loses mass effectiveness the more it fascinates artists. The view that artistic interest in photography was terminated by the "rebirth" of painting was obviously premature. That interest was in fact merely overshadowed by the racket made by the art business. It is not just the increasing number of artists who make use of photographic means to "picture" their ideas that assures photography of an important role in the future too. A further indication is supplied by the art business which increasingly opens up its facilities to committed photographers who would otherwise not have any opportunity of publicising their work. Where apart from museums and art associations could such a critical photo-journalist as *Angela Neuke* show her explosive pictures in the Federal Republic of Germany without serious censorship? Commercial calculation and marketing strategies have supplanted illustrated magazines' former ambition to carry on the tradition of public education, and the book market is not particularly fond of critical and progressive collections of photographs, so there remain only the public and private institutions on the art scene as places where information remains completely unrestricted. Angela Neuke is committed to the ethos of the socially critical photo-reporter, a dying species in professional photography but with successors in the persons of such committed artists as Barbara Krueger and Jenny Holzer in the USA or *Astrid Klein* in the Federal Republic of Germany. In her giant works the German photo-artist visualizes an atmo-

sphere of general insecurity and consuming anxiety. She is a virtuoso mistress of the repertoire of photography, countering with her oppressive visions the picture of an unspoilt world presented by commercial advertising and German television. Astrid Klein's artistic reality consists of light and shade together with soft grey tones. The resplendence of colour photography would only trivialize everything. Angela Neuke and Astrid Klein operate from different standpoints, but despite all the differences in photographic language it is clear that the former has recently employed artistic elments to a greater extent whilst the latter has long made use of journalistic components. Might that be symptomatic of a general change in photographic aesthetics?

Even such an incomplete sketch of the situation facing contemporary photography in the Federal Republic of Germany would be deficient if no mention were made of the Fotoforum in Kassel, its founder *Floris M. Neusüss,* and his inspirational work at the Kassel Comprehensive University. Neusüss is not just an untiring instigator of creative imagination though. As a photographer and artist, who acquired a thorough grounding in photography and studied painting, he is a creative spirit who has pursued a large number of new ways in photography, systematically researching the possibilities of cameraless photography and attracting attention with impressive, wall-filling photograms. Neusüss is one of the people who directed critical attention to the theory and practice of photography. Unsurprisingly that developed out of his intense interest in the cameraless art of the photogram. Even though the photogram – writes Neusüss – "is made from the material used for photos, it breaks with the photo's explicitness and develops the image of a multi-layered, differentiated perception". Casting doubt upon the apparent explicitness of the photographic image so as to unmask the false appearance with which it endows reality is a conditio sine qua non of any advanced standpoint in art and photography today. Floris M. Neusüss recognised that problem at an early stage, so is it surprising that a central motif in his artistic-photographic work is the human figure, the human body, which has not in general been a chosen "object" of modern art as compared with classical epochs? His shadow or light pictures – where what we call shadow is caused by light and vice-versa – also provide sufficient space for observers' capacity for creative imagination. They offer liberation from the "tyranny of images" (Neil Postman), or at least create one possibility of fresh vision.

Jürgen Klauke,
from: Auf leisen Sohlen
(Noiselessly),
1983

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Herlinde Koelbl,
from: Feine Leute
(Top People),
1983

Herlinde Koelbl,
from: Feine Leute
(Top People),
1985

Benjamin Katz, Painters A. R. Penck (right) and
James Lee Byars at a Baselitz Exhibition in Cologne, 1983

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Angela Neuke,
Abgeordnete in Bonn
(Bonn Parliamentarians),
1984

Candida Höfer,
Kurmittelhaus, Bad Homburg
(Treatment Hall, Bad Homburg),
1984

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Gabriele and Helmut Nothhelfer, from: Kinderfest der alleinstehenden Mütter und Väter, Berlin *(Party for Children of Single Parents, Berlin), 1983*

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Jürgen Klauke,
from: Auf leisen Sohlen
(Noiselessly),
1983

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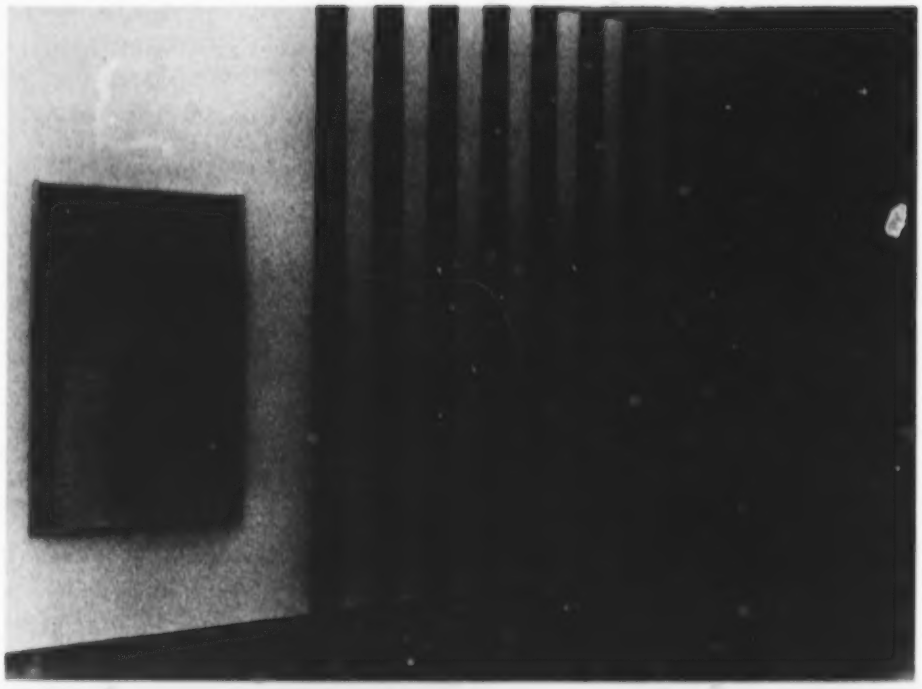
Günther Förg,
Installation in Galerie Hetzler,
1985
(Photo: Galerie Hetzler, Cologne)



Bernd and Hilla Becher,
Coking Tower, Friedrich Heinrich Mine, Kamp Lintfort, Lower Rhine, 1977,
Water Tower, Liers near Liège, 1977,
Water Tower near Ayzwaille, 1980
Gasometer, Duisburg, 1977,
Gasometer near Völklingen/ Saarland, 1979,
Water Tower, Worms, 1978,
Water Tower, Oberhausen, 1977

Bernhard Joh. Blume,
from: Im Wahnzimmer (In the Mad-Room), 1984
4 Images from a Sequence of Large Photos, each 127 x 220 cm

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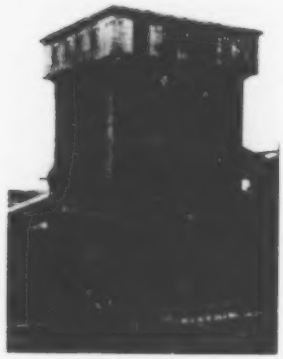
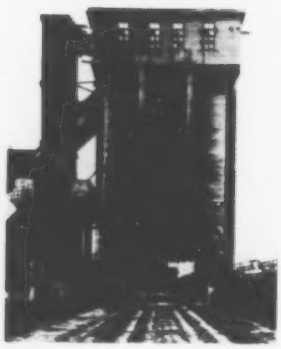

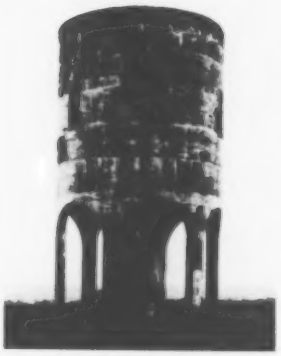
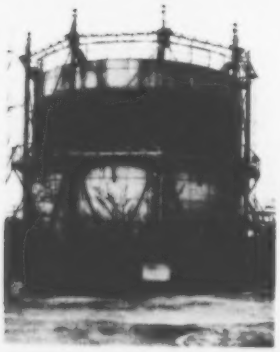
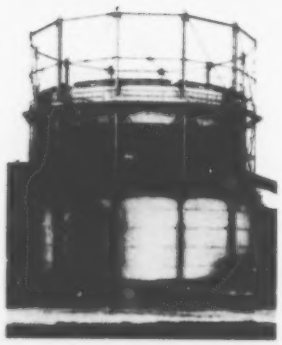

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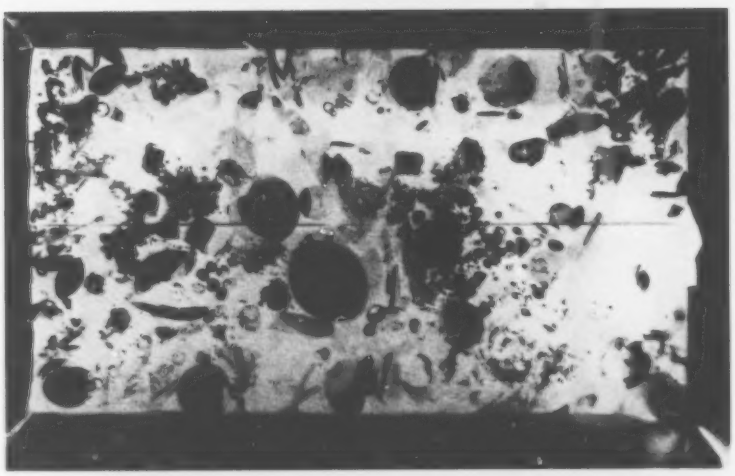
Floris M. Neusüss,
from: Den eigenen Schatten aufhängen
(Hanging One's Own Shadow), 1983,
Photogram Installation
(Photo: Floris M. Neusüss)

Floris M. Neusüss,
from: Wetterfahne für
Issey Miyake
(Weather Vane for Issey Miyake),
1984,
Photogram



Floris M. Neusüss,
from: Nachtmahl mit Robert
Heinecken
(Supper with Robert Heinecken),
1983,
Photogram

Astrid Klein,
from: Spiralsturz
(Spiral Plunge),
1984

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Floris M. Neussüss,
from: Faust,
1984,
Photogram

Floris M. Neussüss,
from: Aufwärts
(Upwards),
1985,
Photogram

Floris M. Neussüss,
from: Narrenschiff
(Ship of Fools),
1984

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Astrid Klein,
Zeitstand abgesichert
(Point of Time Ascertained),
1984

Wulf Herzogenrath

Actions – Happenings – Performance Art – Videos

It is difficult enough to summarize the directions taken by painting in the Federal Republic of Germany but virtually impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of the diversity of trends in the spheres of Actions, Performance Art, and Video. The category of Performance Art has become so broad in recent years because theatre, music, and television have increasingly made use of the possibilities of live action. Making clear-cut distinctions between a presentation of alternative theatre and Performance Art is just as difficult as distinguishing between them and dance theatre as developed by Reinhild Hoffmann or Pina Bausch. The uniqueness, the spontaneity, and the unity of place, time, and event in conjunction with the artist's will to expression are certainly part of the basic definition of Performance in terms of an unrepeatable live presentation, but the most important German representatives of this art – such as Ulrike Rosenbach, Jürgen Klauke, or Barbara Heinisch – frequently have to repeat their particularly successful performances. It is thus only their artistic background and independence of institutions that really distinguish them from fellow-performers in theatres.

From Happenings to Polit-Action and Performance

A look back to the beginnings demonstrates the entire range of this form of art also known as "Fluxus". Around 1960 Fluxus actions were still called "Events" or "Happenings". It was not just in the art world that Fluxus performers in Germany – and their number included Wolf Vostell, Nam June Paik, and Joseph Beuys – and the Vienna Actionists (Nitsch, Mühl, and Brus) attracted a response. The media also fell on these events, tearing such spectacular details as nudity, urination, blood, the cementing of cars, or the destruction of pianos – arousing, shocking, and provocatively sensational as isolated phenomena – out of the context of what were usually long and intensive Actions, often devised as mystery plays. These Fluxus Happenings, which were immediately labelled "Neo-Dada", were viewed as being in a line of succession from the Zürich and Berlin Dadaists. People failed to take into account that the Zürich actions of 1917 pursued a highly aesthetic purpose, striving for a poetic *Gesamtkunstwerk* whilst Berlin Dadaists' activities in 1920 were consciously political, agitational, and progressive in character.

The Happenings of the Sixties, on the other hand, involved an expansion of the sphere of art and the incorporation of new experiences within what is in the meantime a highly technological society – as, say, in *Vostell*'s "In Ulm, around Ulm, and round about Ulm". The shock resulting from a new way of looking at the achievements of our "Economic Miracle" society was linked with what presented itself as a more open form of theatre. In theory the incorporation of spectators' participation was meant to put an end to their passivity, but the artist had a concept, a plan for the order of events, so the audience could only play a very limited part. Nevertheless, new experiences and feelings, completely new places of performance at

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unusual times of day or night, became accessible to the public, and in the Seventies varied forms of those ideas were taken over by theatres.

The number of classic Happenings even declined in the Sixties as the word "Happening" was misused in advertising and the media, and applied to other spheres. The most important basic principle for artists from the Fluxus group declared that art and life should become one, and that every aspect of life could also be seen in artistic terms. That view culminated in Joseph Beuys' proclamation: "Everyone is an artist", a maxim that was taken to an extreme in social and political terms by the members of "Commune I" as the real foundation of their lives and activities. That of course once again raises the old question of where art starts and where it ends.

It was therefore not surprising that artists then started to express themselves more precisely, specifically, and in greater detail. On the one hand, specific media spectacles, especially created for television, were staged. *HA Schult* should be mentioned in that context. And on the other hand, since the Seventies there has been a retreat to purely artistic realms and a specific form of "Performance" totally limited to the person of the artist. These artists often made use of music, slides, or video – but seldom so loudly or spectacularly as in Sixties Actions.

Performance Art has become very much more personal since then, operating with themes from German history and individual experiences. In the Eighties artists such as *Ulrike Rosenbach, Jochen Gerz, Marcel Odenbach,* and *Jürgen Klauke* have also developed impressive "Performances", which are short in length but extremely intensive in their development. *Barbara Heinisch* links her Performances with the act of painting. Many younger performers such as *Mike Hentz* or the "Tödliche Doris" group use music to establish strong emphases. Another group of artists has once again turned its back on the museum so as to reach a broader, ecologically interested public with their actions. In 1981 *Gunter Demnig* laid a trail of blood from Kassel to London, and extended a thread from Kassel to Venice. Two years later he drew a chalk line around Cologne – actions that only he can implement on foot but which can be documented and transmitted by the media. *Lili Fischer* extended the sphere of Performance with her plant actions, demanding: "Entrance only when accompanied by a plant". *Joseph Beuys,* who died in January 1986, stimulated many of today's artists committed to the ecological cause. He himself carried out an exemplary action in that sphere when he launched his "7,000 Oak Trees" campaign at the 1982 documenta 7, committing himself to planting that number of oaks by documenta 8 in 1987. Most of these trees are growing in Kassel but Beuys did make exceptions and established saplings in front of the North Rhine-Westphalia Ministry of Economics in Düsseldorf, or in Cologne to mark the "Year of Romanesque Churches". Beuys thus attempted to counter destruction of the environment by way of this "symbolic planting of the earth".

Video Art

The influence of the media has turned out to be even more burdensome and one-sided for Video Art than for Performance.

Culture may attract increasing recognition in the media, but what price has to be paid? Art magazines and colour television demand recognisable, reproducible art reduced to personal characteristics: colourful pictures in a handy format. There is no place there for wide-screen epics or works in monochrome, for detailed narrative or creations critical of the media. The "Neo-Fauves" are ideal for coloured reproductions, and some works are even much better like that than in the huge gallery format which drives up prices. Artists have to stylize themselves; certain photographers capture the scene; and the individual creator develops poses – not in a new visual language with revolutionary details, but in pictorial styles which should be as familiar as possible and take up clichés from the past so that a sense of recognition is intensified among consumers. The Fifties are being quoted at present, but the references are to the trivialities of the ice-cream parlour world, Vespas, plastic bombs, and James Dean rather than to the critical, difficult, and intellectual aspects of the age as presented in Beckett, Wols, or Cage.

Such phenomena reveal the contradictory nature of the art scene, which may place its bets on reproduction but believes the reproducing media to be of secondary importance. In a reversal of Walter Benjamin's views about the work of art having lost its aura because of its reproducibility, today our diagnosis must be that such reproduction and the excess of magazines, journals, and personality shows have obviously once again conferred status and value on the original work of art. The value of a work of art and the status of its creator only mount as a result of multiple reproduction. The cult of personality requires reproduction.

The media – and particularly the electronic media – only seldom want to take the next step though, developing or promoting an art that specifically takes the media into account. The art scene also prefers to direct its attention towards the tradeable original and the unique discovery. All the slogans about popularisation and ideas about democratisation involved in Ars Multiplicata, as emphatically expressed at the end of the Sixties, seem to have been forgotten today. Only the market value of the non-multipliable individual work seems important.

That is one of the reasons why we rarely find works of Video Art at the big art markets in Cologne

or Basel. The few galleries that offer video seem exotic. The same attitude is also reflected in such big exhibitions as Cologne's "Westart" or Berlin's "Zeitgeist". The most important video artists were, however, present at Düsseldorf's "von hier aus" show. The excellent "aktuell 83" presentation at the Lenbachhaus in Munich, which "Der Spiegel" called "probably the most exciting exhibition in 1983", was another exception. The "Rheingold" show in Turin also attempted to bridge the media, bringing together important artists from Cologne and Düsseldorf. Video was represented by Nam June Paik with his concerts, Beuys, Ulrike Rosenbach, Marcel Odenbach, Ingo Günther, and Klaus vom Bruch. Video, the art that truly refers to our age, is thus seldom integrated in exhibitions. There is also a technical reason for the limited representation of video on such occasions. Video installations or sculptures have to be created in such a way that at least their basic elements can be recognised in a relatively short time. Excessively complex, loud, or dominant video works do not go well with pictures and sculptures.

The joint training of painters, sculptors, and video artists at art academies would constitute an important basis for a beneficial intermingling of art forms. Up to now though Düsseldorf is the only German academy to have really taken this step, even though timid attempts are apparent in Hamburg, Berlin, and Munich. Düsseldorf gained a great lead with the appointment of Ursula Wevers and Nam June Paik as teachers in 1979, and initial successes are already apparent with *Ingo Günther* and *Peter Kolb* gaining international reputations. Wevers' class has itself presented several exhibitions in various cities; *Jean François Guiton* won the Bonn Videonale Prize; and autonomous works by *Klemens Golf, Gerd Belz, Axel Klepsch, Franziska Megert-Vogt*, and *Daniel Poensgen* have also attracted attention. There are also important artists in other parts of the Federal Republic, including *Michael Klier* in Berlin, *Barbara Hammann* in Munich, and *Rotraut Pape* in Hamburg.

Video Art disposes – within the technical characteristics of this medium – over a wide range of creative possibilities whose subject-matter artists can use and interpret in a great variety of ways. The wish for the greatest possible degree of realistically depicted reality, which plays an important part in TV, is also of great importance for video artists a generation after invention of television. Attacking viewers' ways of seeing things, breaking down their passivity, and confronting the significance of realistic or apparently real communications are characteristic themes for video artists. *Robin Page*, a Canadian artist who lives in Cologne, was very successful in 1971 with his TV action "I stand on my head". He invited viewers to make a drawing of him during the few minutes he was to be seen on the television screen. Nothing happened during that time apart from the possibility of contemplating the artist. 3,000 viewers were nevertheless sufficiently courageous to send in their drawings. Television thus activated its otherwise passive audience.

Paik and Vostell employed video equipment in their objects as early as the Sixties. Their objective was to make the viewer think critically about television and its programmes, so they wanted to have the TV set comprehended as a sculpture that can constantly be reinterpreted in changing situations. In a four minute video tape dating from 1970, Joseph Beuys puts on boxing-gloves and covers the TV screen with felt. A reversal of normality takes place here. It is the viewer who defends himself against the overwhelming influence of television. Video artists have confronted that theme in a great variety of ways, but only a few of them believe that television can be used in a positive way. They have, however, frequently utilised it in recent years as the raw material for their own montages. In his "Modern Times" ("Moderne Zeiten") *Klaus vom Bruch* puts together fragments from original TV advertisements to create a montage intended as an autonomous creative contribution to the "Year of the Child". The realm of electronic representation, offering an extensive sphere of technical possibilities, provides another opportunity for video artists. In an early Fluxus action dating from 1963, *Nam June Paik* manipulated TV images by using magnets so as to "paint" electronically on the 625-line screen.

Another aspect of video work is devoted to the documentation of actions and Performance Art. Video serves here as a kind of note-pad, an electronic diary that everyone can utilise. In this more limited sense it is also a documentary medium of particular importance for all artists who want to direct the spectator's attention to the artistic process or event rather than creating works on canvas or paper, in stone or wood. Particular mention should be made of three women: *Rebecca Horn, Friederike Pezold*, and *Ulrike Rosenbach*. All three employ video to record actions which were specially conceived for the video-camera. That does not therefore involve a performance in which anyone can participate. Only the video-camera is a witness to the action. This method allows the artists to edit the visual sequences themselves whilst checking them on the monitor. These three women share the scepticism of most exponents of Concept Art towards the static work of art created in traditional ways. They want to integrate their bodies, their feelings, and their personal view of things in their works. They thus achieve an impressive transformation of the personal into generally comprehensible optical signs.

Another group of artists makes video installations and objects. They want to incorporate the observer as a part of the artistic impact in the simultaneity of experienced reality and reflection on reality. *Dieter Froese, Wolf Kahlen*, and *Marcel Odenbach* should be mentioned in that connection. The most interesting examples of these variants of video art

come though from Nam June Paik as a Korean living in Germany. One of his works was even presented in a TV show before an extensive public. Five video environments were created, including the "Fish TV", a huge pyramid made from 40 downwards-reflecting TV sets, "Video Buddha", a "TV Tree" with small biliously colourful apple TVs, and a "Hanging Garden" composed of empty TV cabinets out of which plants grew. Such a presentation is, however, still rare on television. Instead of making the best use of the medium's most inherent qualities – electronics, live presentation, experiment, and openness – and presenting artists' original works, TV stations prefer to produce informative portraits about artists. The artists put up a fight against that by way of their own initiatives such as "Infermental", the first international video-cassette magazine produced by *Vera Body* (Cologne), the Bonn "Videonale", or – as the museums' answer – the "First German Video Art Prize" (Marl). The New Berlin Art Association and the Bonn City Art Museum already dispose over videotheques.

During the past 20 years the advertising industry has quickly and radically taken over and commercialised innovative avantgarde ideas from Pop, Op, and Concept Art. The outcome is that media artists today seldom still make their living from the art world, which offers few possibilities of earnings and is inclined to be dismissive about promotional activities. Video artists have therefore turned to popular themes in the meantime, employing these in video-clips for television and producing particularly outstanding achievements in the sphere of music videos. Video art has also established completely new and remarkable spheres of action. An "Artists in Bureaucracies" project has been under way for years now in ministries in North Rhine-Westphalia. In 1985 the *Land* Ministry of Transport commissioned a "Community video art project on road safety". Ulrike Rosenbach covered "Concentration in Traffic", Klaus vom Bruch "Speed and Speeding", and Ingo Günther "Alcohol and Drugs Whilst Driving". The idea, as Marie Hüllerkremer has written – was "to make effective use of generally innovative principles from the artistic avantgarde" because "art offers the kind of event necessary for learning about the world". These artists' video-clips are basically different in style from normal commercial spots since artistic perception is not the same as what is to be found in commercial advertising's flood of images.

Nam June Paik,
TV Pyramid,
1982,
Video-
Installation
(Photo: Wulf
Herzogenrath)

Wolf Kahlen,
Junger Felsen
(Young Rock),
1971,
Video-Installation
(Photo: Wulf Herzogenrath)

Marcel Odenbach,
Any Step Could be Wrong,
1981
(Photo: Douglas Sharp)

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Nam June Paik, TV Flower, 1983, Video-Sculpture (Photo: Wulf Herzogenrath)

Ulrike Rosenbach, Schmelzprozesse (Melting Processes), 1982, Video-Environment (Photo: Ulrike Rosenbach)

Ingo Günther, Die Weltregierung (The World Government), 1985, Video-Tape (Photo: Wulf Herzogenrath)

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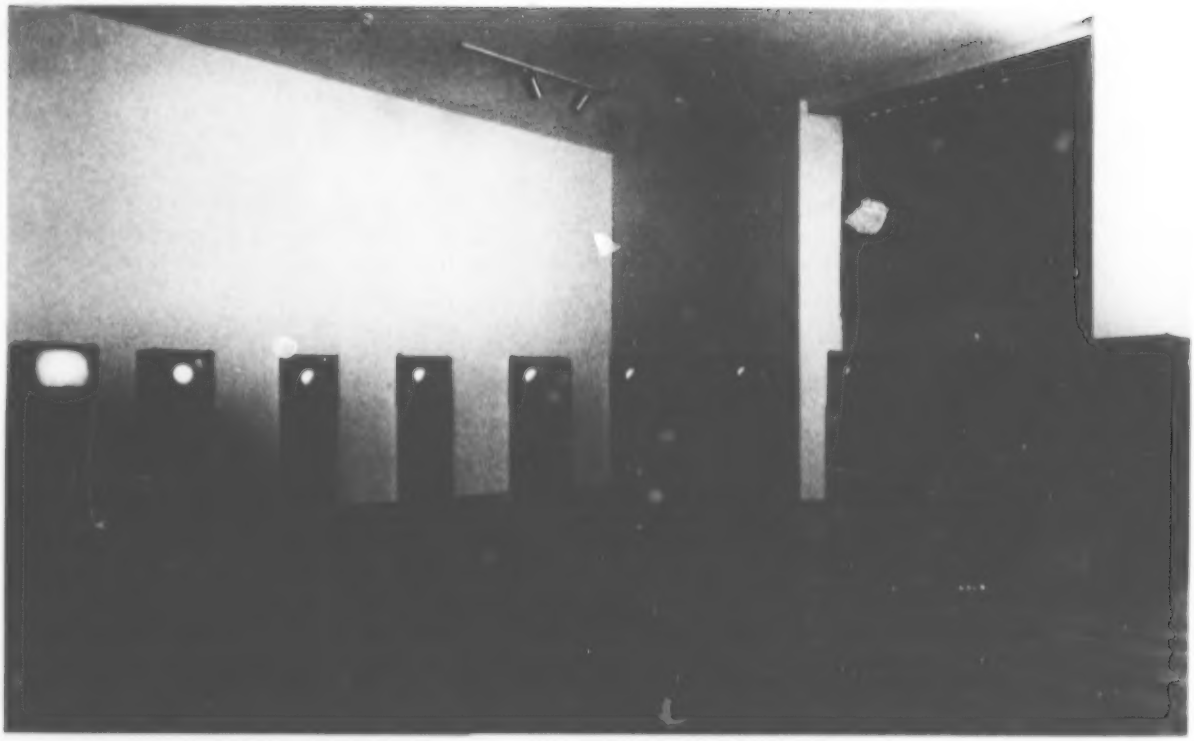
Nam June Paik,
TV Moon,
1977,
Video-Environment
(Photo: Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam)



Ulrike Rosenbach, Aufwärts zum Mount Everest (Upwards to Mount Everest), 1986 (Photo: Ulrike Rosenbach)

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Barbara Hammann,
Blick in: Katla – Schwarzes Instrument
(Looking into: Katla – Black Instrument),
1985
(Photo: Barbara Hammann)

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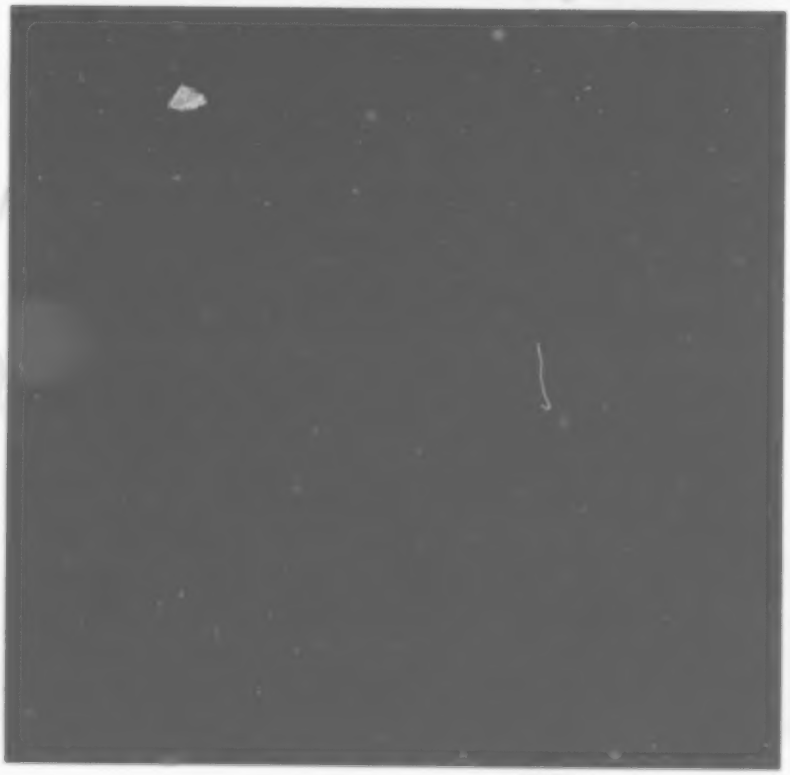
Barbara Hammann,
Auto-Polaroid,
1985
(Photos: Barbara Hammann)



Barbara Hammann,
Dim Sum – A Little Touch of Heart,
1985,
Video-Installation
(Photo: Barbara Hammann)

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Marcel Odenbach,
Die einen den anderen
(The Ones to the Others),
1986,
Video-Tape
(Photo: Lothar Schnepf)

Wolf Vostell,
Endogene Depression, Version
Nice,
1986,
Video-Ambient
(Photo: Wolf Vostell)

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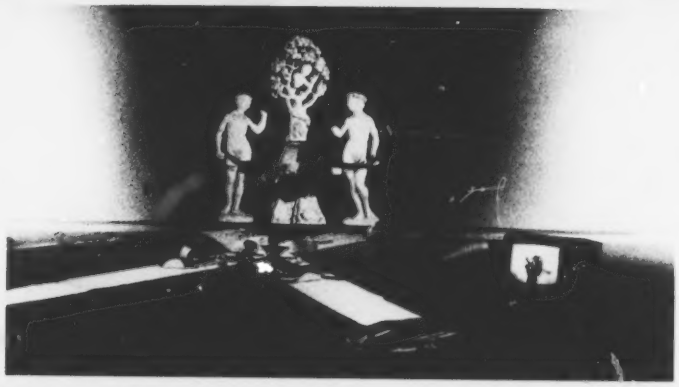

Ulrike Rosenbach,
Begegnung mit
Eva und Adam
(Encounter with
Eve and Adam),
1982,
Performance/
Action
(Photo: Ulrike Rosenbach)

Ulrike Rosenbach,
King Kong,
1977
(Photo: Ulrike Rosenbach)

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Jürgen Claus

Setting Off into New Regions – Environmental Art and Gestalt Technology

People were talking about environmental art even before awareness of destruction of the environment became established. Art does not follow ecological, social, and political discussions but in fact prepared the way for such discussion, having constantly pointed to the reality of destruction of the environment since the second half of the Fifties.

Art thus turned out to be, among other things, a seismograph of things to come, although the observer must possess or acquire the ability to read art's "instruments". It would certainly be useful to start this account by reaching agreement about what is signified by environmental art, gestalt technology, and their forward-looking combination in eco-technology.

I view *Environmental Art* as entailing not just a thought or imagined concept but rather an implemented creative and innovative step towards reality and the realisation of an artistic idea established within the ambience of town, nature, or even the media. In terms of that definition, the conceptual recording of an idea by artists is not a part of environmental art. Such art is constituted by implementation, by the step from a concept to its realisation in space or within the structure of time and space.

I use the term *Gestalt Technology* to characterise the outcome of the electronic and technological art which got under way in the second half of the Fifties, reached an initial peak in the Sixties, and in the mid-Eighties is heading for a fresh highpoint, brought about by the constantly expanding "palette" of electronic equipment. The eye as the outpost of the brain (as Willi Baumeister so strikingly put it) perceives the Gestalt, the whole. The work produced by technological means is holistically read, seen, experienced, and stored up as a Gestalt. Gestalt Technology is the deployment of current technology with the objective of inventing a Gestalt – unlike the broad range of applied technologies.

If one speaks in the sphere of visual art of *Eco-Technology,* that is comprehended as the artistic interpretation, analysis, and deciphering of the environment and its multiple aspects with assistance from technological media, processes, and equipment.

For all that there exists a German tradition which was eradicated before the Second World War. German art can in no way be reduced to a common expressionistic denominator, even though that may at present sometimes seem to be the case. The other tradition, linked in the visual arts with names like Paul Klee, Kurt Schwitters, or Moholy-Nagy, laid the foundations for a visual creativity that is absolutely contemporary provided one is not ready to accept a single "Zeitgeist" and the monopoly of a single form of expression. It is not exaggerated to see Paul Klee as the "Eco-Artist" par excellence. His Bauhaus lectures dating from 1921/22 provide a manual of environmental art. Natural phenomena served him as a way of endowing the laws of artistic creation with meaning. Moholy-Nagy is also a key figure in terms of the history of Gestalt Technology. The time-space-continuum that he worked out and analysed plays a central part in today's digital art.

From "Zero" to Sky Art

When in the Fifties art set off for new regions beyond the classical disciplines of painting, graphics, and sculpture, the people who were then young artists frequently sought stimuli, friendships, and exchanges of views abroad. *Wolf Vostell* later said, not without reason: "I owe more to the street than to any educational establishment". It was also from their friendships with Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana, or Jean Tinguely that the "Zero" artists gained the courage to burst the bounds of the occupied fields of art. "Zero 3", published in 1961, depicted what was already in existence, and offered a promise of what would be. Cultural institutions – according to *Heinz Mack* at that time – "still demonstrate the constancy of graveyards". He countered that in his "Sahara Project" with the wide expanses of the sky, the sea, the Antarctic, deserts – expanses of fulfilment, of the most extreme challenge, and not of flight.

"The word 'Sahara'" – Mack told the author – "was always just a synonym for such untouched areas of freedom. We live in a world in which any culture is ultimately metropolitan culture. In that sense the big city, which is in turn a kind of Sahara, is intended as the sphere of our work's impact. To that extent many of my works were just models for larger objects within an urban situation". For Mack light became an aspect of energy, a symbol for energy. His environmental sculptures live dialectically from the energy of cosmic nature. They thus contain nature – but not in terms of classical depiction of nature. If works are successful, they themselves become objects within a new nature, unifying light and movement, deploying nature and technology, and ultimately expressing energy.

Otto Piene's text "Ways to Paradise" from "Zero 3" reads like a manifesto for today's Sky Art: "My higher dream involves projecting light into the great night sky, discovering the universe as it is open to light ... Why do we not produce any art for the air above us, any exhibition in the sky?" From 1968 he energetically set about realising air sculptures, and today he has more experience of big flying sculptures than any other artist.

After the 125 m. high and 400 m. long artificial "Rainbow" for the closing ceremony at the 1971 Olympic Summer Games at Munich, Piene started to weld lightweight plastics in forms frequently based on natural elements. That was also the case with his "stage sets" for the "Icarus" Sky Opera which was staged in 1983 at the Munich International Garden Show and formed an integral part of the 3rd Sky Art conference. The series of such conferences, which Piene concluded in 1986, drew attention to the far-reaching significance of today's Sky Art, bringing together researchers, scientists, artists, technicians, and philosophers of space. The two video-discs which were produced under Piene's direction from 1982 provide a compendium of art in space with their technological record of environmental art as a documentary example of eco-technology.

Adolf Luther published his "1st Cosmic Manifesto", affirming cybernetic architecture and the art of light, in 1964. He also opened up cosmic space to this art. His 1976 "Moon Project" involved the idea of capturing light in reflectors and projecting it onto the dark side of the moon. His recent ambitious project, the "Wernher von Braun Memorial", is also based on the incorporation and dissemination of light. The models dating from 1983 and thereafter operate with curved sieve-like materials and with rounded glass struts and supports.

Marcel Kalberer set up his "Soft Structures" group in 1977. His flying carpets and other balloons make use of sunshine's hothouse-effect for flying. Such flying bodies can also be put to practical use as alternative forms of transport. Solar air cushions of between 1000 and 1200 m^3 can carry a load of 100 kg in addition to the weight of materials involved. Kalberer launched his balloons in the Swiss Alps and elsewhere in 1980.

The range of today's Sky Art in the Federal Republic extends from Light Art by way of flying sculpture to incorporeal telecommunications events. Laser installations are both visible and immaterial as created by various artists and designers such as Adolf Luther, Horst H. Baumann, Rolf Lieberknecht, Wolfgang Lettner, and a constant succession of new groups and teams.

Horst H. Baumann has been intensely involved in laser projections since the start of the Seventies. He used a laser beam at Kassel's documenta 6 (1977) to highlight topographically important places in the town. In the meantime Kassel has bought the laser installation and thus established it as a lasting work of art. For all his large-scale projects today Baumann uses his "Lascan" unit, a mobile laser projection laboratory. Scanners, controlled by mini-computers, make possible the projection, even over considerable distances, of moving images, texts, and symbols. Baumann and Nam June Paik have also worked together on laser-video presentations in Düsseldorf, Linz, and New York.

Rolf Lieberknecht, a trained architect, has created both flying objects, presented during the Federal Garden Show at Kassel and elsewhere, and short-term laser installations in conjunction with Berlin's Technical University. He says that "Fantasy images hung in the sky retain the freedom of the incorporeal. They are there and at the same time evade tangible reality. They derive from the substance of spirit and senses, and when they disperse they return to their original state".

In 1984 Professor *A. Gangkofner*'s "Light and Glass" class had to create a laser environment as its semester project at Munich's Academy of Visual Arts. 14 years earlier, *Edgar Knoop*, working at the same Academy, had prepared a laser network between the city's Olympic Tower and the nearby gasometers but high costs prevented its realisation. Mention is made of those endeavours because art academies in the Federal Republic of Germany generally make heavy weather of integrating new technologies in their curricula.

Holography and Computer Art

One exception there is the Media Development/ Media Research study group under Professor Manfred Eisenbeis at the Offenbach Main College of Design, established some years ago. The group has focused on the possibilities of artistic depiction and application of "Seefax" *(Bildschirmtext – Btx)*. German and foreign artists such as Al Copley, Ben Vautier, and Thomas Bayrle, or women designers including Birgit Malsy-

Grimm, Heide Hagebölling, and Andrea Wunderlich have produced an entire catalogue of Btx graphics that can be called up by way of telephone and Btx links since 1983.

The outcome was presented to the general public when the 1984 "Art and Technology – Setting Out for New Realities" exhibition, shown in the Bonn Federal Ministry of Research and Technology, provided the first overview of work by West German artists in the spheres of holography, computer art, cybernetic sculpture, video-discs, and Seefax. One of the gratifying outcomes of that presentation was the Ministry's readiness in 1985 to make budgetary provision for production of holograms by a number of students at West German art academies.

Holography, like other spheres of Gestalt Technology, also requires relatively lavish equipment. It is not therefore surprising that many of the holograms seen at exhibitions were industrial products and did not exhaust this new medium's artistic potential. The situation is slowly beginning to change in the Federal Republic thanks to such practitioners as Dieter Jung, Brigitte Burgmer, Mike Mielke, and Wolfgang Fürstenberg. At various exhibitions from 1983 onwards, *Dieter Jung* has presented his "Into the Rainbow" hologram series on plinths of differing heights. The vertical and horizontal structure in these Rainbow holograms is transformed as the observer changes his position. Holography allows Jung to display the painterly elements of visual art "illusionistically" as events in colour and light within space. Linking the holographic illusion of space and real space in a kind of sculptural synthesis is artistically interesting. *Brigitte Burgmer* follows that path when she incorporates the holographic reflection of a human face in a pedestal-like sculpture which in turn serves as the source of a neon beam projecting into space. The artist has also devoted intensive study to the theoretical and philosophical foundations of holography.

One of the world's first museums of holography has existed since 1980 at Pulheim near Cologne where Mathias Lauk today accomodates over 500 holograms. Since 1983 Lauk has used parts of his collection for comprehensive surveys of various spheres of application for holography, shown in such places as the Sprengel Museum in Hanover or the Deutsches Museum in Munich.

The most extensive presentation of international holography to date was organised by Walter Classen and Katharina Voss for the opening in 1984 of the German Film Museum at Frankfurt am Main. The almost 400 page catalogue with all its illustrations and collected texts is a real treasure-trove providing information about the technical, technological, artistic, and philosophical aspects of the medium. The private galleries run by holographers Mike Mielke in Munich and Peter Ludwig in Cologne are also part of the German holography scene.

Today's utilisation of the *Computer* produces fundamentally different results from the kind of "mathematical graphics" that became known in the Sixties. The computer graphics created by the "Complex Dynamics" research group at Bremen University exemplifies the new approach. The group's speciality is investigation of complex patterns of behaviour in dynamic systems, making use of computer-produced graphics.

Ever since the Seventies, the comparative ease with which problem-oriented computer languages can be learnt makes it unnecessary for the user also to be a specialist in data-processing, mathematics, and logic. The "true time" procedure – with graphics produced on the screen instead of by printer – has changed possibilities of utilisation, the picture quality, and the complexity of computer art, and yet artists in the Federal Republic have only made hesitant use of it so far. A scene for current computer graphics has hardly developed.

The concept of Computer Art involves considerably more than what is entailed in printed or screen graphics. Computer technology is employed today in works of environmental art, telecommunication events, laser projection, cybernetic sculpture, and in other spheres of an expanding art. Attention can be drawn here to Bernd Kracke (Telecommunication) Manfred Kage (Digital Video), Bernhard Leitner (Sound Areas), and Ulrike and Dieter Trüstedt (Audiovision).

In the years ahead it will become even clearer that Environmental Art and Gestalt Technology (as initially defined here) do not exclude but can rather complement, enrich, and extend one another. Technology can only be meaningfully employed within an art that leaves frontiers behind if artists distinguish between what is essential and what is merely a visual by-product within technological development, and if continued and renewed attention is devoted to the nature of space, participation of the observer, the environment as an urban or elemental challenge, and integration of society and its demands. Excessively simple solutions are incapable of surviving in art.

The "Setting Off into New Regions" sketched here is fundamentally different from three other spheres of artistic and environmental action: from forms of "Eco-Art" that exclusively return to nature by way of natural found materials; from participatory events aiming at socialisation as frequently found in community festivities, painting actions, or "Art to be Touched"; and also from "Searching for Evidence" or "Staging the Environment". Those three aspects of environmental art remain unconsidered here, but attention should, however, still be directed towards other forms of such art where the everyday world becomes an everyday aspect of art. If people talk about the town as an arena for art, they initially think of sculpture and embellished public places rather than everyday worlds. And yet those very everyday worlds

Otto Piene,
Sky Art,
Charlotte Moorman am Ballon
(Charlotte Moorman
Hanging from a Balloon),
IGA Munich 1983
(Photo: Jürgen Claus)

have opened many windows of perception.

The foundations for this linking up of art and the everyday world were established – among such artists as Wolf Vostell – as long ago as the Fifties. In the three decades that have since passed, Environmental Art has opened up new areas, new media, and new public structures, presenting itself as a system linked in many ways with contemporary social, economic, ecological, demographic, and cultural data. Environmental Art thus viewed becomes a new quality of art.

In 1981 *Wolf Vostell* sent the "Fluxus Train", a mobile museum in a nine truck train, on its travels for several months, thus putting to the test Environmental Art defined in that way. This work was concerned with the world as a sphere of conflict. "I'm interested in depicting world phenomena – and no longer (as at the beginning) in taking social phenomena close at hand as the basis for a work" – stated Vostell. The train with its seven environments travelled from town to town, making possible integration of each individual town culture. The town as an arena for art thus expanded to become an extensive urban landscape.

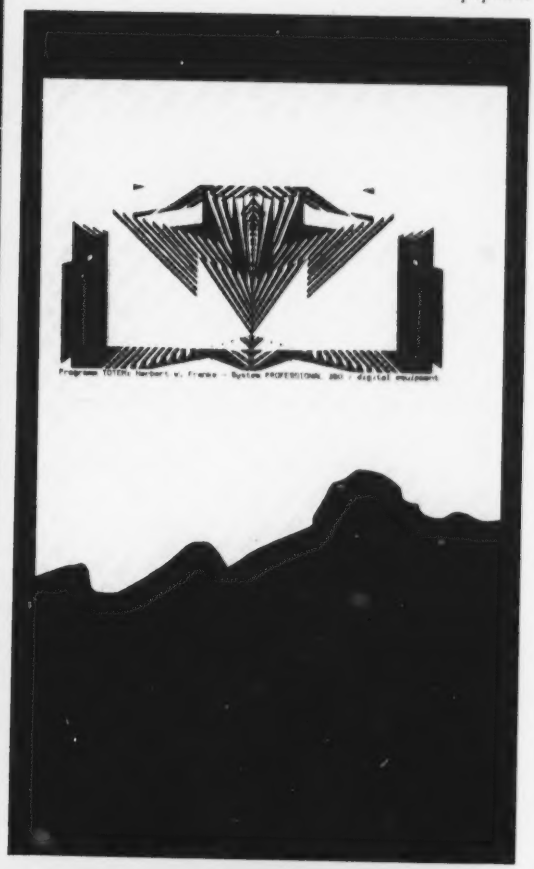
HA Schult has confronted the everyday world in many actions in the Federal Republic and other countries. These actions include his 1978 "Ruhr Tour" and "Now" in New York. That kind of environmental art subjects the everyday world to discussion. Art becomes a kind of hearing: very direct, clear in its language, and non-theoretical. For artists like Schult it is important to discover new places for mediation alongside the museum. In his "Ruhr Tour" he thus made use of public squares, miners' meeting-places, opera houses, factories, refuse tips, and sports stadiums as sites for gatherings.

Environmental art can become a social strategy demonstrating wrong behaviour within our society – as in the socially critical actions organised by *Dieter Hacker, Otto Dessler,* and *Hans Haacke. Hermann Grup,* who began in architecture, has also carried out vividly tangible demonstrations of environmental consciousness. He thus had 35 rented cars on the middle strip of Berlin's Kurfürstendamm "greened" overnight with a grass covering. The objective was to spark off discussion about the quality of life in the city and about the precedence given to individual forms of transport.

This "Setting Off into New Regions" has many aspects but always the shared aim of challenging people, subjected to so many restrictions, by way of another way of thinking and experiencing which is not just rational and functional. The public is directed towards asking questions rather than being offered finished models of the world. Provocation is of importance there. Making decisions for oneself is at the same time an important part of the learning process, necessary for survival today amid fundamental changes in society, culture, and media technology.

Jürgen Claus,
Im Skulpturengarten
(In a Sculpture Garden),
1979
(Photo: Jürgen Claus)

Herbert W. Franke,
TOTEM
Programme, 1984
System Professional 350, Digital Equipment



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H A Schult,
Deutsch-Land (German-Land),
1986
(Photo: Elke Koska)

Bernhard Leitner,
Ton-Raum-TU Berlin
(Sound-Space-Berlin Technical
University),
1984,
Installation
(Photo: Fotostudio TU Berlin)

Horst H. Baumann,
Laserscapephil,
Berlin 1983
(Photo: Jürgen Claus)

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Otto Piene,
Icarus,
IGA Munich 1983
(Photo: Jürgen Claus)

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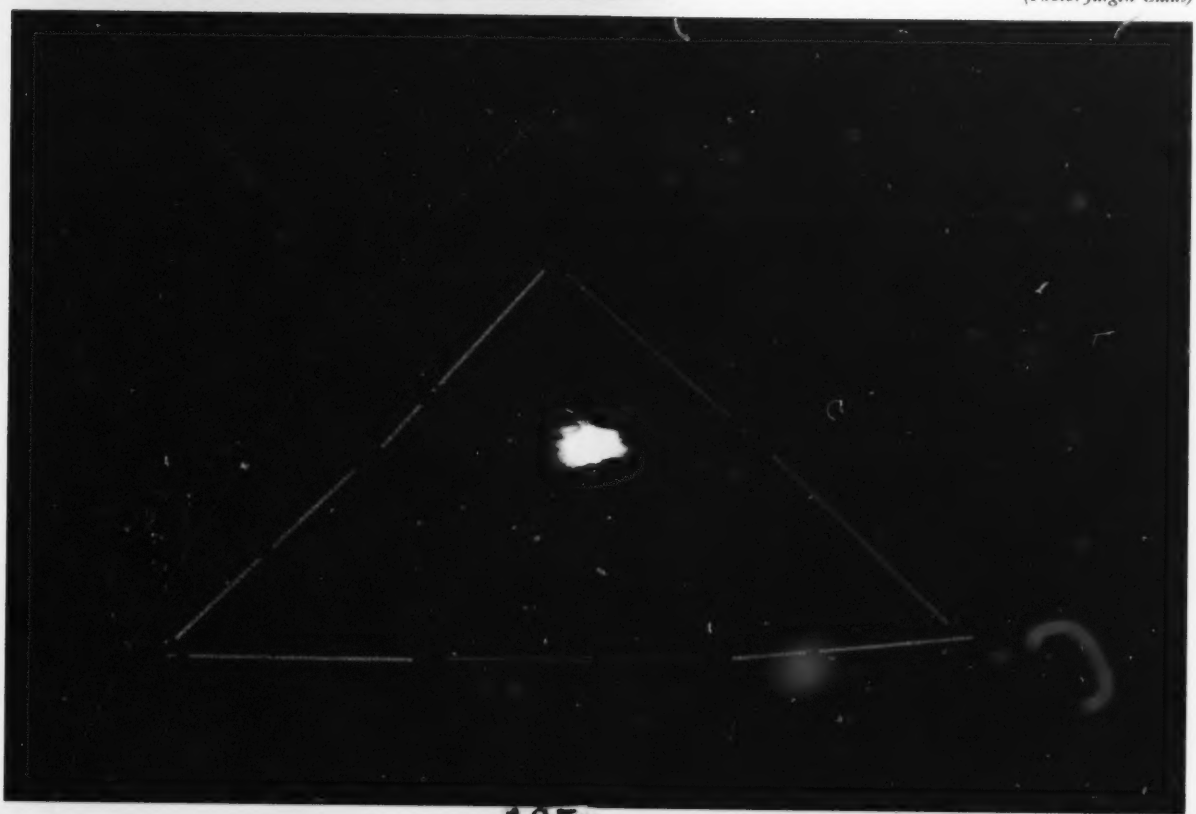
Jürgen Claus,
Sonnenskulptur
(Solar Sculpture),
1984,
Performance with Solar Energy
(Photo: Jürgen Claus)



Klaus-Jürgen Sembach

Design

For the foreign traveller arriving in Germany first impressions may come from the German railway system, the Deutsche Bundesbahn. He or she may rest assured though that not everything in this country is as unimaginatively conventional as the exteriors and interiors of its trains. The crimpled little table-lamps shining in the dining car are an expression of the taste prevalent among a specific managerial group but not necessarily a sign of "national style".

It is nevertheless regrettable that such a big national enterprise is not more acutely aware of outward formal appearances. Good models do exist abroad – and there is also a German tradition that leads one to expect something better. After all, the Bauhaus and the Ulm College of Design used to exist in this country; a number of excellent designers whose precursors were such pioneers as Walter Gropius and Peter Behrens have long been working here; and, not least, the German Werkbund has been reminding people about "Good Design" for almost eighty years now. The fate suffered by the two celebrated schools seems, however, symptomatic of our relationship to design: excellent ideas, hopeful beginnings and then, after a number of years of development, a sudden end. Other countries are then glad to take on the legacy.

The Bauhaus and the mature style of 1930 died under the dictatorship of National Socialism. The College of Design, which Max Bill, its first director, viewed as a continuation of the Bauhaus, succumbed to inner disputes. The petty-mindedness of individual teachers and lack of understanding on the part of the authorities brought about the end of the respected institute. The challenge still constituted by intelligent shaping of the world around us obviously could not be endured. Unconsciously it was probably felt to be an attack and a threat. Irrationality and design are incompatible.

Repression provides a way out of that situation, and one form of that process entails banishment into anonymity. Good German design therefore likes being nameless, thereby seeming more self-evident and less provocative. Who knows the name of the designer of the handy "Minox 35", the highly successful smallest 35 mm camera in the world? *Richard Fischer,* the originator of this successful design, is not mentioned in the advertising brochure – and the word "design" does not even appear either. The camera does not in fact have anything spectacular to offer in that respect. Its form is as compact as conceivable; it is sturdy and easy to use, and, small though it is, fulfils all the requirements of an engineer. It thus constitutes the best possible design, and is today already well on the way to becoming a classic – albeit an anonymous one.

The same happened earlier to the legendary NSU Ro 80 and its designer *Klaus Luthe.* When such a new kind of car came onto the market in 1967, its wedge-shape was an important innovation. Luthe may in the meantime have become BMW's chief designer but his name is even less known today than it was then.

Italy, that wonderland of design, shows us though what prestige designers can enjoy. Bertone, Ghia, Giugiaro, and Pininfarina, the Turin car couturiers, have a worldwide reputation. And even someone not directly interested in design has heard the names of Harry Bertoia, Gio Ponti, or Ettore Sottsass – not to mention the illustrious creators of clothes. In Italy design is obviously a matter of style, something where function, Zeitgeist, and its personal interpretation can coincide – and not, as with us, the product of an absolute rationality without any preconditions. The artistic claims that play a part in Italy, preventing things remaining anonymous, also ultimately result in design being a matter of national concern there.

What exists in Italy could also be possible in Germany. One only need think of the long tradition of good design in this country, and of such names as Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Ferdinand Kramer, and more recently Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Hans Gugelot. Opportunities for official establishment of "German Design" were, however, constantly missed despite many exhibitions, prizes, and suchlike – even though that would have been an absolute possibility in terms of the quality of existing design.

There are many reasons for that failure. The lack of support for leading names was, among other things, an expression of uncertainty. Only a few individuals surmounted such an attitude. They understood how to link an ethos with mass production of well-designed goods. Braun and its designers – headed up to the present day by *Dieter Rams* – provided the model from the mid-Fifties onwards for a very design-conscious approach. Its products were both aesthetically perfect and also embodied an idealistic concept. It was not without reason that the elite of the time gathered around these things, which became tokens of an attitude that was not merely material. Braun equipment did in fact entail something akin to a

design for life. The honest but by no means charmless severity of these industrial products expressed a conviction that was exceptionally agreeable amid the usual banalities. Their clear-cut morality was – and is – certainly very German. The fact though that this was presented with great elegance and without becoming formally doctrinaire enabled it to become a world-wide success.

Even though quite a lot of other firms apart from Braun had a similar attitude, that did not nevertheless lead to the development of a national programme attracting attention at international trade fairs. "Design", it once again became apparent, is not generally viewed in Germany (and particularly not among the state bureaucracy) as an embodiment of spirit and morality but rather as their opposite. It seems to be suspect, and viewed as an expression of elitism rather than something fundamental. This misconprehension continues to be widespread so it can only be viewed as a national syndrome.

Another factor also plays a part in good design remaining a fringe affair in Germany. This is the already mentioned claim to absoluteness, constantly demanding the best and most mature solution. On the one hand this sets a high standard, and on the other it paralyzes development. How should perfection be exceeded? The outcome is that a large number of classical twentieth century products are once again – or still – being produced. New products can hardly flourish though in the shadow of these predecessors. Young designers and their ideas are scarcely used any longer. No matter how gratifying the former may be, the consequences of the latter give great cause for concern, leading to a flight into nonsense and anti-design. Among the best-selling books in recent years were thus two presenting very different views of "Design". "Möbel, die Geschichte machen" ("Furniture That Makes History", Hamburg 1982) brought together all the household objects that have long maintained their place on the market plus those which are expected to do so in the future. "Design als Gegenstand – Der Neue Glanz der Dinge" ("Design as Object – The New Splendour of Things", Berlin 1983) offered a chic presentation of designs which will obviously never find a producer. Nonsense, deliberate kitsch, and rewarmed Fifties products are assembled for a smart get-together. The bright display scarcely conceals the degree of desperation apparent on these pages. The bitter truth is that almost everything is a variation of the pre-existent, and what is new can hardly be both original and meaningful at the same time.

And if that is the case, then certainly not in a spectacular way. New designs will of course continue to be demanded by industry but these must develop quietly. A muted tone characterises the scene. Even the exception to the rule, Luigi Colani, the duty Joker, has not made any recent appearances. The outcome is that the public scarcely registers any longer what changes are taking place. Design no longer seems to be a topic of interest.

The arena is, however, by means dead, and recognised German designers have enough to do. Just one example. *Hartmut Esslinger* and *Andreas Haug* work in Altensteig, a little town in the north of the Black Forest, obviously deliberately far away from the big centres. And yet their office, well-known as "frogdesign", is one of the most successful on the international market. One of the most celebrated clients is AEG; work comes from SONY in Japan: and an outpost in California looks after the "Apple" computer concern.

If, foreign traveller, you are now leaving Germany again, you would do best to take the Lufthansa Airbus. You will certainly discover how pleasing the interior is. At first sight it may not look very different from other planes but the agreeable impression will remain, and closer observation will show you that mastery really does involve the details. The window trimming, the shape of the luggage lockers, and, above all, the lighting are exemplary. The overall interior thus coheres in the creation of a harmonious appearance immediately pleasurably transmitted to the psyche – a not unimportant process when flying. The Airbus was jointly constructed by the European Community but the interior was devised by *Horst Sommerlatte*, the German designer. His work provides excellent testimony to the state of present-day possibilities: sensitive intensification of what already exists, and improvement of what is good – but no more storming of the heavens, not even when an aeroplane is being built.

Thomas-Form TC 100 Tableware, Design: Nick Roericht (Photo: Rosenthal)

Minox 35,
Design: Richard Fischer,
Offenbach
(Photo: Minox)

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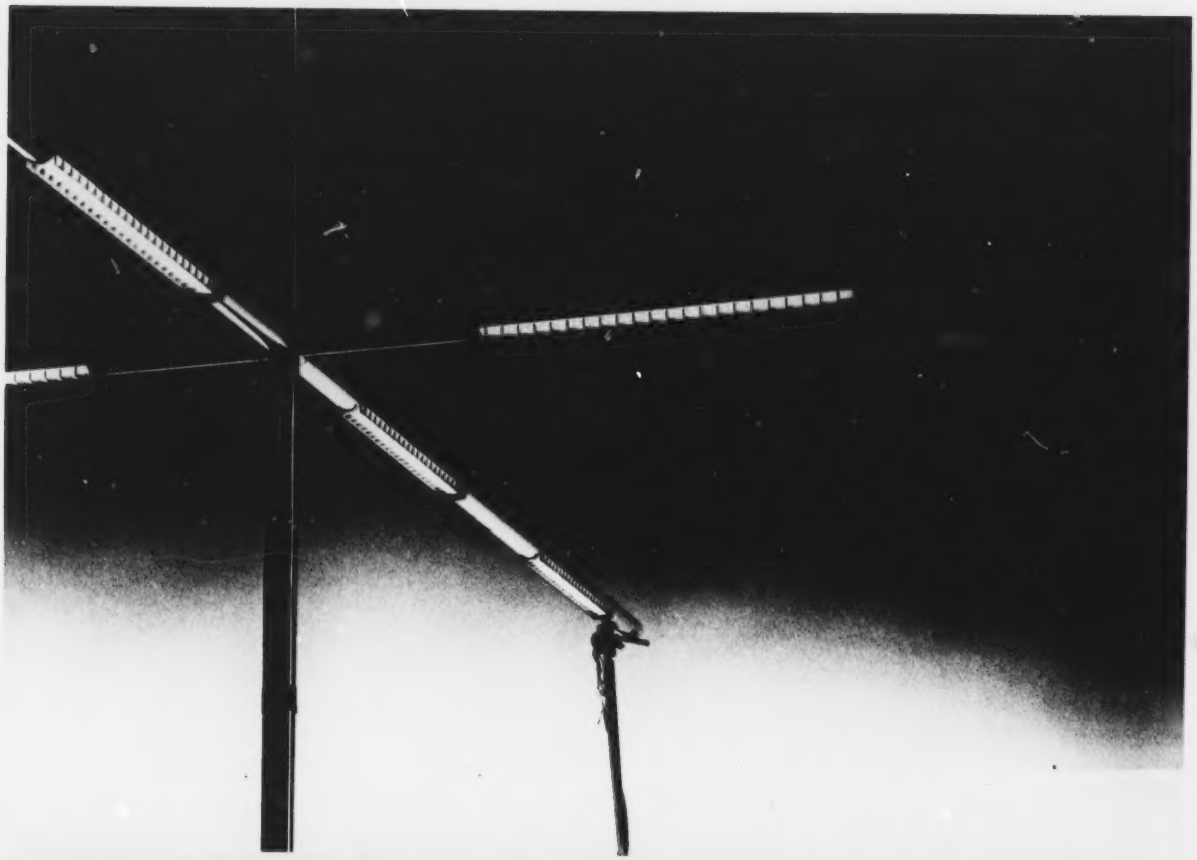
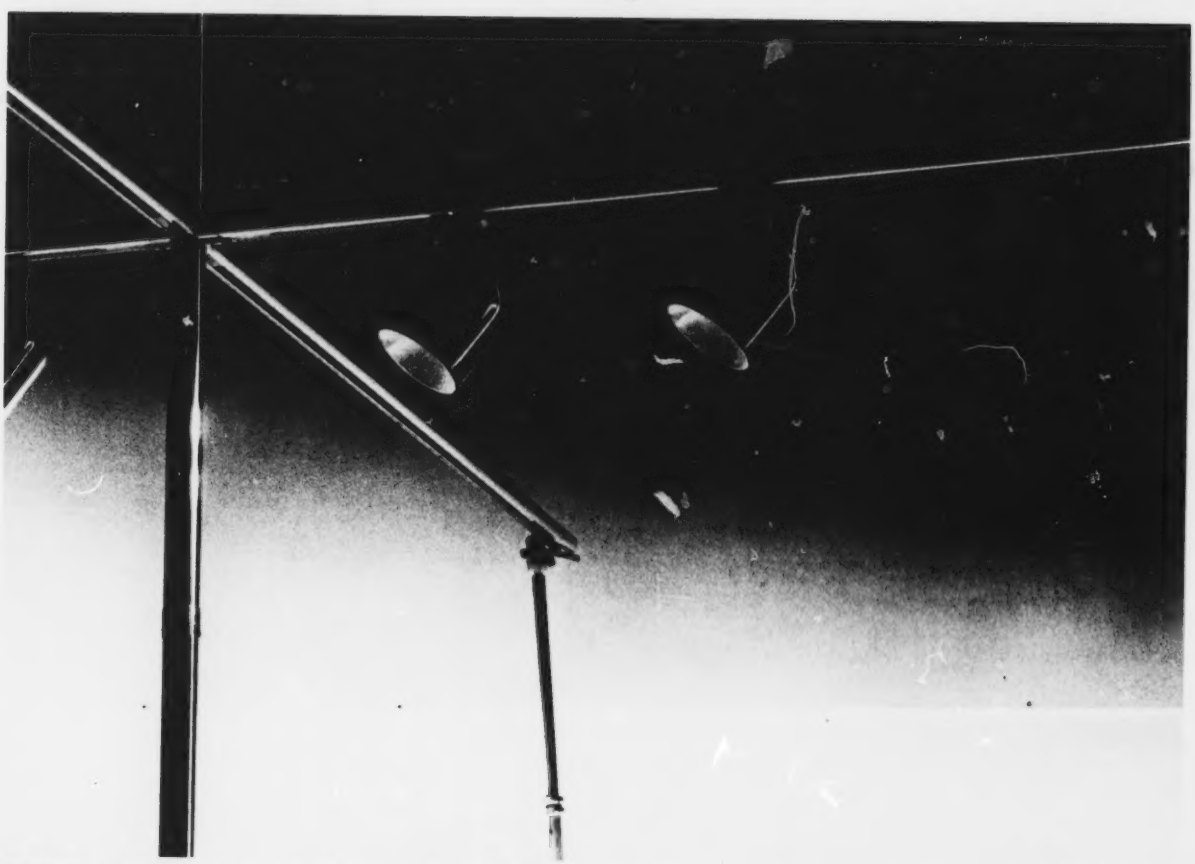
Monopoll Lamp for Fluorescent Tubes *Design: Shiro Kuramata and Masayuki Kurokawa* *(Photo: ERCO)*





ERCO-Domotec Reflector, Design: Alois Dworschak (Photo: ERCO)

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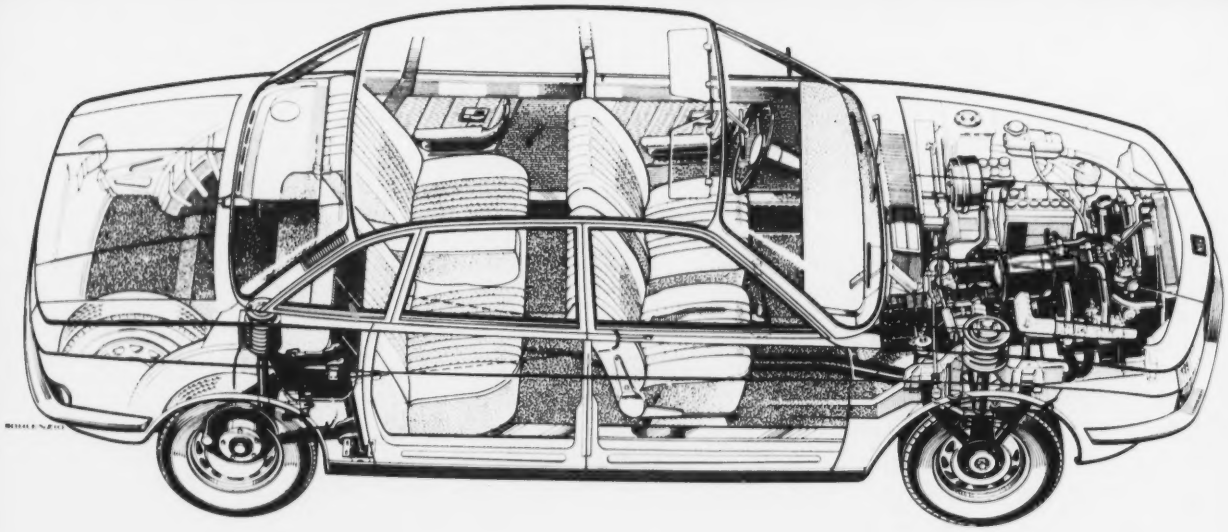

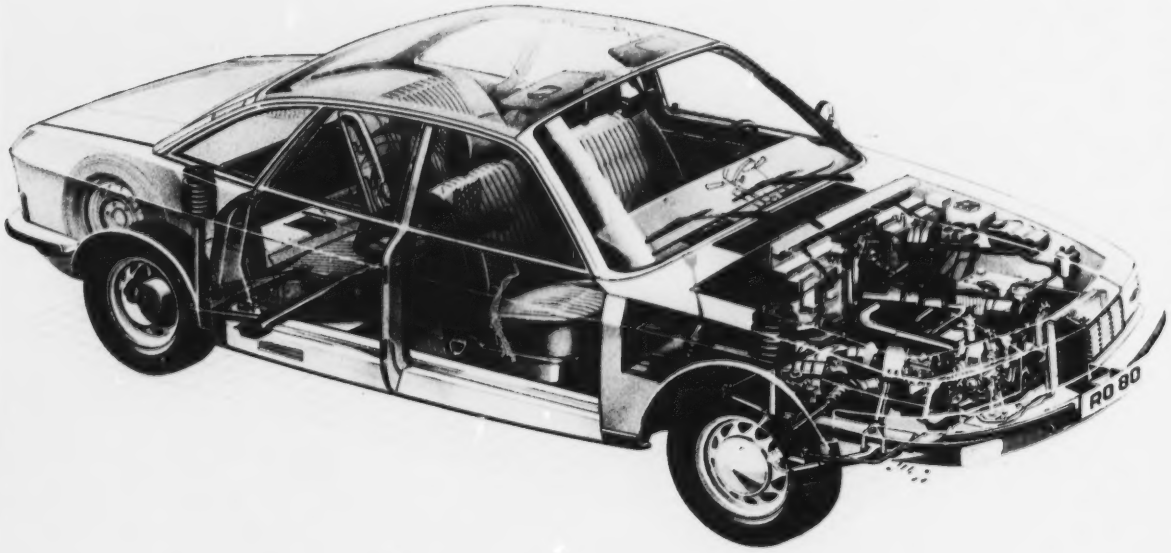

RO 80
Design:
Claus Luthe
(Photo: Audi/
NSU)

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